Padma Sherni's

Dil Pickle Dilemma

"Dil means: with heart"

By Pialee Roy, Ph.D.

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DEDICATION

To my formal and informal educators: teachers, family, and friends, who offered learning and growth opportunities in a multicultural setting.

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The relationship building efforts stemming from growing socio-emotional awareness are many people's opportunities to advance from and share or withhold cultural identity. I am thankful for my opportunities to travel locally and globally to visit with family and new acquaintances, and to build friendships in order to understand multicultural contexts better. I am especially thankful for the camaraderie of those individuals who have encouraged and cheered me on in my professional and personal pursuits as well. Thank you.

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Padma Sherni’s Dil Pickle Dilemma, "Dil Means: With Heart"

Introduction

In 1980, during a purposeful visit to mystical India to spend time with my grandparents and extended family, I was a happy, content, and adventurous toddler from America, learning to talk, walk, and dance. I would thoughtfully traverse across the well-planned neighborhood, on elevated tippy toes. Exploring onwards from my bustling busy and academic grandparents' house to discover the whereabouts of other jovial yet professional, boarding school educated, or Tagore inspired, extended family and friends, the bicycle rickshaw and vendor-bordered suburban pathways kept me thoroughly entertained. I plodded along, carefully, on the paved path with occasional potholes. As I sauntered over to neighbors' homes, I avoided occasional puddles of muddy water, with my sandals, pretending that they were actually imaginary ballet slippers, like the real ones I had practiced dance with, back home on glossy hardwood floors in a mirror-aligned classroom.

My typical days pursuing education and employment back in USA included preschool study with a lot of colorful, glued, construction paper for arts and crafts, frilly and career-oriented dolls, wooden blocks that were blue, red, yellow, and green, shape sorters, puzzles, and large easels to paint primary and sometimes secondary colors on. My emerging literacy curriculum included practicing recognition of letters, numbers, colors, shapes, and story time songs!

My mother had immigrated to USA from India after both completing her BSc. college degree alongside her art hobbies, and marrying my father, already a Ph.D. educated individual searching for career establishment in America. At home, my mother helped me to learn those early education lessons in "Bengali" along with folk songs. I had the opportunity to go from the South Shore suburbs to the Boston area cities to learn North Indian Hindustani Classical Music Lessons as well, in a third language, "Hindi". My teachers included those who were either Gujarati or Bengali. They were serious, talented gurus who shared some of their teaching, sometimes humorously, the guidance usually following a subtle gauging of my level of interest and commitment to the potential offer of lessons. I was lucky to have had their proximity to learn the lovely melodies. Sometimes I struggled with translations of these languages, however, until someone would explain during Bollywood movie viewing get togethers, what was being said according to the plot lines.

In preschool, like at home, we even had a public health curriculum of learning how to brush our teeth properly with bubble gum flavored toothpaste. These teeth models later were juxtaposed by my grandfather's dentures left often on the side of the sink, anywhere in India, or wherever he travelled to on scientific meetings. The item was carefully placed, avoiding the *tik tikki* or wall crawling lizards' attention due to their wall climbing mishaps

resulting often in plopping onto unsuspecting seated guests. This issue was yet another curiously observed phenomenon for a child visiting India from America.

Typically, I attended preschool and other grade levels of American education in regular western style outfits like blue jeans with t-shirts, practical dresses or sometimes frilly ones as well. However, my mother would also often let me wear Indian garb like Rajasthani style *ghagra choli* skirts and dressy tops or a silk sari for special occasions like school functions and parade events or banquets.

My favorite part of this dress up was that I could wear colorful metal and plastic costume jewelry bangles to complement the silk or cotton outfits. Sometimes, the ornaments were real 32 karat gold *churis* or bracelets to replace the fragile glass bracelets popular during that decade.

During the preparatory protocols of travel, my meticulous father would fastidiously weigh the overly stuffed suitcases comprised of neatly and compactly packed gifts, like makeup, perfume, and house décor, for our family and friends abroad, only to discover similar items and already imported ones at our destination land available at almost half price.

Still tagged and ticketed from prior travel, the strong luggage pieces would be squashed to closure with my sitting on them, only to be weighed multiple more times, amidst our anxiety from contemplation of whether or not risking extra fees or total decline of the slightly overly weighted contraption was worth it. Voyaging to India, from USA, with stopovers, was always a welcome excursion for me, especially finding the airport hotel television programs featuring western sitcoms from the decade prior, spoken unexpectedly in the local European language.

Once we arrived at my grandparents' place, my family members would eagerly share stories with me about my parents' youth. My energetic mother, for example, would climb the local *payara* fruit trees according to their retelling of stories. During this trip, however, she was a practical no-nonsense 24-year-old, and as part of her motherly duty had thoughtfully brought along for me relevant outfits given the intermittently sunny days or monsoon weather rains, and humid climate. She also brought many refills of the paper packet of cream-colored instant milk powder for my travels. She would mix the packeted contents in a small glass with a swirling teaspoon, rummaged for, among other non-set utensils, with carefully boiled hot water, then also filtered additionally, before consuming. These were the days much earlier than the subsequent trend of overly purchased plastic bottled spring water by overseas immigrant families visiting their *desh* or land.

My mother had thoughtfully packed for me a lot of those paper packets of instant milk because although there were a lot of cows and goats around, to stop traffic better than the local authorities, for some reason, no one drank as much milk as I did! The milk they had smelled funny to them at first, therefore they would mix chocolate flavored protein powders to add improvement. Orange and clear carbonated drinks were also a very delicious go-to that I had been fascinated to discover! In addition, the sweet coconut water, or *daab-er jol*, from a spherical green and rotund fruit, was sipped with my own straw, when we visited beaches and other places!

We were empowered with healthful energy from home cooked foods and good examples from our *desi* family's all-morning and sometimes all-afternoon kitchen cooking, directed by my *shuthi* cotton sari-adorned grandmother on one floor and my aunts from another floor, in the typically three tiered buildings with flat rooftops. While we waited, having eventually completed our homework, my cousins and I had *muri*, or crispy rice, *shingara* or samosas, absorbing Bollywood movies that we had rented, this time from the local store in India. Sometimes we would have *kumro* or butternut squash in a flat fried format and the fruit's yellow-orange flowers can even be dipped into a flour-based batter mixture and fried with a little bit of vegetable oil, for a crunchy savory snack.

The slate blue painted wooden and netted cabinets by the kitchen were also locked daily so that no one, including me, nor the voluntary housemaids would take extra tiffin boxes or other items from their contents. Inside the cabinets were typically where oversized clear plastic jars with manilla colored lids were stored, containing delicious savory or sweet circular crackers or rectangular, chocolate and bourbon filled biscuits. These treats would only remind me that there were mini marts and *pan walla* and *poochka* stands, with more plastic jars filled with toffees and chewing gum, and, of course, additionally, bars of chocolate.

At home, candy hearts and chocolate chip cookies were preserved in ceramic containers, that my mom had painted and glazed, during participation in an American art class. She had graduated from Tagore's school and maintained her upbringing and a few art endeavors for many years. These practical art pieces were set in proximity to where the contents were served with tea in the adjacent room: the family room with wall décor from *batik*-on-silk tie-dye designed expressions! Learning about heritage and cultural expressions was part of intergenerational upbringing.

Eventually, when I had a younger sibling to accompany me on these trips, he and my cousins would surreptitiously take time away from hours of homework assigned to each of us, and curtailed meetings with *mastermoshais* or tutors, to stroll over to the vendor

stands to enjoy spherical potato chip like *poochka* treats dipped in curried chickpeas and tamarind sauce. They approached the *poochka wala,* only to discover, my mother and aunts already at the stands, with the same intent. They each had stronger stomachs than me, at the time, while I prepared, at my grandparents' home, with the other family members, the associated antidotes of those excursions!

Soon enough we would be admonished to complete our homework by my grandfather, chasing us or the local monkeys that would try to steal papayas from the yard or other garden vegetables. Once we got serious, the additional guidance from a compact study room was where other professionals and studious Bengali and English literature prolific professors, students, visitors, and friends had received a warm hearted or long list of errands or revisions to complete depending on the respectful client's sincerity or motivation levels.

As I participated in various affinity groups, for arts, education, dance, sports, music, etc. I learned to adjust to my emerging multicultural identity. I was enmeshed among many talented surrogate desi families in USA, at first learning to network by word of mouth, rather than today's typical exchange of cell phones and email addresses. The unexpected cultural opportunity of being an Indian American, *Bengali and Hindu* child, in USA,

eventually lead to celebrating most other faith based American holidays also. What an opportunity to resolve dilemmas of intergenerational and diverse experiences in growing identity and cultural adjustment resolutions!

As I sorted through my choices in affiliation and growing identity, life's milestones were achieved at times with many advisors unexpectedly. Sometimes this was a welcome intervention, and other times spoiled plot lines for romance. When finally focused on homework, at the least expected moment, I would find the folder of would be suitor profiles printed out for me to review from the online dating ads (formerly newspaper ads) that my parents had perused on my behalf, tucked into my pile of paperwork. The dilemma of what to focus on more, my courageous aspiration to earn a Ph.D. and prove my professional status next to much more academically adorned prior generations, typically male, and sometimes female, or give in to contemplating work life balance early to keep up with the challenges of friendships, personal relationships and parenthood prospects in womanhood. What characteristics were most valued in a two income demanding economy? The dating profiles now listed both males and females to have career prowess for some and to be good homemakers simultaneously. With a typically risk averse personality, the only chance I took at the wrong time was to forego settling down at 34

years of age in exchange for having a better sense of how I wanted to relate to the concept of person in environment.

As I sorted through the consequences of this dil pickle dilemma, and gauging other people's simultaneous success or failures accordingly, we had events to celebrate nonetheless. My annual last quarter of the year holiday participation included Thanksgiving turkey other than the one vegetable lasagna incident that was somewhat disappointing, saved only by baked goods on the side. However, we always expressed gratitude for what we had, especially visits and phone calls, at that time of the year, from friends and family. The thoughtfulness of giving gifts from Santa's workshop after saving birthday money from earlier in the year was a typical event also. We practiced faith-based prayers for almost everything, especially if one had a brother, plus a festival of lights, Diwali (Deepawali) with candle lighting. These festivities sometimes coincided with amateur theatre performances to celebrate cultural heritage, juxtaposed by costume party dress ups for other holidays, like Halloween, and placing origami birds on an assemble-it-yourself Christmas Tree. We celebrated life, and birthdays, and many special occasions, without intending to disrespect anyone, however sometimes the eclectic lifestyle was due to conflicting messages about how much to accept or not of diversity and inclusivity efforts. I possibly considered that I might have a *Shaanthi* or peace clause to cope with all these things,

especially parental opinions, and community supports, by grace of grandparents' interventions and other cosmopolitan advice.

Speaking of festivities, we also celebrated childhood rice feeding ceremonies with sweet rice pudding, referred to as *paiyesh*, and again for birthdays. Additionally, we often supported celebrations of toddler propensities, with a plate presented with various symbolic items, like gold bangles, pens, books, and sporty plush toys to predict the likelihood of associated success, given those choices! I was told I had reached for both a gold bangle and pen, and therefore, I am trying to fulfill this expectation every so often! There is also, of course, astrology predictions for life guidance, and I compared both those readings to whatever I could find in American magazine and newspaper columns, when I was more unsure of myself and eventually just got through it all with a mantra, some music or art, here or there, and of course learning how to grow and relate as a result of my experiences.

The parents often held onto their traditions with strong self-respect and living life at various paces of assimilation and acculturation to new customs. The families had immigrated during daunting trips from India to the east coast of the USA. They returned for visits, like us, to their *desh* or "the land" of the "home country". These trips would happen occasionally, as my grandparents and their families had requested, to retain both our

Indian heritage and upbringing. We were among those who immigrated in the 1960s to 1970s cohort of many of a new wave of Asian families who had moved to the land of opportunity for work and education. Unlike many of these wonderful peers, however, I was born in America! The cultural contrast took time to navigate.

Upon arriving in the suburbs of Calcutta, West Bengal, India, with my then teddy bear comrade, and a newly emerging vocabulary of both English and Bengali, we traversed over to other local cities, to *mandirs* or temples, and friends' and families' homes, always with a gift or packet of offering something, in exchange for the visit. Sometimes, we traveled by local bicycle *rickshaw* to the *mishtee dhokan* or sweet shop to buy *shondesh* made from sugar, molasses and ricotta cheese, thoroughly cooked, hand crafted, and cooled out on a tray. The shops often might even have savory potato-filled *shingara,* better known as samosas. We would then gift these items placed carefully into paper boxes, coated in wax paper, wrapped up with twine, string, or elastics.

We would then navigate overcrowded trains with rusty metal horizontal bars on the windows, trying not to drop our overfilled arms of other items, vying to get space for both ourselves among many other passengers. Our overly packed suitcases with us, which no one else was often allowed to carry, even after bartering with us, in local business fashion. There was no assigned seating at that time

on the local route, for two hours without air conditioning, from the suburbs to the city, on hard wooden seats fastened with old nuts and bolts. However, the hot tea, snacks, and toy vendors kept us entertained. *Garam chai* poured from an extra-large metal tea kettle complemented by *muri and badaam,* the spicy crispy rice mixture with roasted peanuts served in a self-made half-cubed and half-cylindrical newspaper packet and alongside sweet orange-like clementines.

At other times, the personal driver led cars or taxis, or old-style sedans called "ambassador" cars would be a nice complement to train travel so as not to bother my teddy bear or me during these important trips to enjoy life and informally learn about the culture, traditions, and my family.

Content from my travels, visiting aunts, uncles, and cousins who were all assigned to play *ludo* and *carom billiards* with me, we would also spend time singing folk songs with harmoniums, tablas, and other musical instruments!

Mid-morning, we enjoyed delicious *luchi or spherical fried dough*, yellow and white potato sprinkled with spices like turmeric, salt, sugar, and black cumin, also referred to as *shadha thorkari* with green coriander garnish. Plus, our plates would include yellow omelets spiced with green chili peppers, salt, and diced tomatoes

also. Eventually, we would return "home" to my grandparents' house and for dinner, be served cooked rice or *bhaath*, flat bread *roti*, lentils or *daal*, and veggie mixed *thorkari.* Additionally, *maach bhajha*, *aloo bhajha* and *baegoon bhajha* also referred to as fish fries, potato fries and eggplant fries, were on the menu after we shopped in open farmers' markets or purchased the items from the home visiting street vendors to our neighborhood. Chicken curry made with *garam masala* and cardimom in a thick or watery *jhol* or other meats were sometimes presented also. This was a lovely menu thoughtfully prepared with support each day from voluntarily employed housemaids who visited from a neighboring village. They might help with cooking, cleaning, or childcare along with specific daily instructions.

At wedding events, there would be both a juxtaposition of regular plates, or snacks and foods on banana leaves, with a teaspoon of salt, a lemon or lime piece, green chilli on the side, and another tablespoon of mashed pickle with a mango flavor yet rather spicy or tangy also referred to as "aachaar". Usually *raita* or a cucumber yogurt and tomato chutney were offered to cool these efforts as well. In order to get a second helping of the main course, the seated individuals would strategically, politely and humorously call the servers over to their neighbor to kindly please offer them a spoonful of the menu item like veggie or meat *biriyani*, or mixed rice, and yes, you might as well offer a spoonful to the

calling individual while they happened to be there anyways! Ha ha. Thank you!

One day, perplexed as a toddler, that a male cousin, challenging me had tried to make an outlandish and possibly inappropriate offer of an exchange with a fruit bar, for something that I had, I resorted to an adamant protest with a stay cool strategy. I wasn't sure what they were after exactly, however, it was annoying, and I wasn't giving them *anything,* not my *ranna bati* or miniature cooking items to play "house" with, nor game pieces from some colorful *khalna* or game. These were items that I had stuffed in my purse, in case I needed a *chokkha* or "number six" to get my game piece out from one block and onto a roundabout board path towards the next home base. They were not to have these things either and not even the biscuits pocketed and crumbled somewhere else in my purse. Where was everyone? After a few minutes of standing there, contemplating carefully as to what to do, I concluded that neither me nor my teddy bear were interested in this bartered offer. I had the common sense to walk away with the good influences.

I usually then sought someone else, for my next endeavor: typically, my older cousin sister, to gently comb my black hair with big curls. When I was older, as a high schooler, I would be instructed with tiresome beauty regiments, like coconut scented

ayurvedic hair oil massaged into my long strands and then braided with a black string to hold everything together along with lemon and *masoor daal* or lentil based exfoliating face masks if not egg masks. I would have typically skipped these time-consuming efforts, however, was cornered by three generations of women instructing me, yet giving me free space as well to just be. After years of noncompliance, one day I tried this effort on my own and pretty soon so were my friends and others. Food items were becoming beauty products, however not everything!

Later, during that same toddler trip, however, my teddy bear got stolen by some of the teenage boys playing and running down the street. I, unsuspectingly, was trudging on the side pavement in the city, entertaining my bear and minding my own business. I had not yet learned the vocabulary of protest well enough, other than the go-to for toddlers in any country: I stifled tears for a few silent moments and then wailed loudly for this irreplaceable friend. After much consoling, I expressed my woes by feeding biscuits to the house puppy and spending time with the dogs for awhile instead. Eventually, I recovered, assuaged by other priorities, such as playing *ludo* or with cousins, sharing stories, songs, and other toys. No one dared to challenge my toddler self after that, well- except for once. The aunts and cousins tried to put me to nap time eventually, with a bottle of lukewarm water replacing my usual packet mixture of dissolved instant sweet milk at first, and then like

a well-tossed frisbee or basketball away across the room went the bottle and its contents, knocking my cousin over her head, somehow displaced to the floor and I, an almighty toddler, waiting patiently for a replacement among otherwise caring family members.

However young I was, I observed impressive, important events and customs, like respect for every grain of rice, not wasting food, and charity to share with people who came to my family's residence and asked for rice or anything of donations, and my family would share something with them, learning to be thankful also for what we had.

In other scenarios, I also saw one of my uncles out of control once as he was a cousin of my other uncles and had blood pressure problems and am so proud of his kids for retaining a sense of self by responding with a grumbling tantrum consequently so as not to be defeated by the oppression. Their mother would console them both and eventually talk things down with the uncle, until all was well again. During any stressful times like these, when getting in trouble with our own parents for anything, having grandparents around, in turn, to describe our parents' behavior to, was our welcome and successful intervention approach to dealing with these unanticipated problems! Consequently, the elders would restore decorum to the households, and all was well.

During my childhood, I learned about *lode shading* and saw faith-based practices, watered the gardens with my maternal grandfather and cared for people. I visited India many more times, and as a teenager, and I finally realized that *lode shading* happens when the electricity goes out so the government saves some energy, and then people light a candle and let the heated wax tip on from the top of the slender or stout item onto a window sill made of a solid stone. One can then fasten the bottom of the candle stick onto the counter with the sample wax, so it cools with both pieces fastened there. This was a fascinating discovery for me, even though flashlights were available as well.

One evening, the lights went out, and my cousins and I proceeded in the blanket of evening, to sing songs. As a teen now, my younger cousins outpaced me still with Bollywood-level *antakshari,* a song game where one of the first or last letters of the last word becomes the first letter of the next word that the competitor must sing a song with. Very challenging. I had already participated in both American English songs for chorus, Bengali folk music lessons, and the beginner's level of North Indian Hindustani classical music lessons in America, yet I hadn't yet comprehended the vocabulary well, nor had I enough of a bucket of songs yet to compete in this lively singing game. So, eventually, I got distracted and, sitting there on the flat level, third-floor rooftop singing songs in *lode shading* noticed a guy across the street

somewhat our age, who was smoking a cigarette. As a teenager, I thought my future public health self should get a head start in sign language in encouraging males to not smoke. We had learned so much in America about not smoking! But during *lode shading* across rooftops, this hand gesture of me signing to put out the cigarette startled him, and my cousin started laughing so loud, and eventually, I realized I likely looked like I was blowing away a kiss. Not quite. Oh no, no, no. That's not what that was. I tried to explain to my cousin as well, and she just jetted off without me, laughing so hard, and then I left quickly seriously protesting also. Eventually, we moved on to other *antakshari* stories.

The taxi drives were mostly where I got my bucket of updates about the latest and most popular song lists and going to the video stores either in the USA or India helped me select good movies to watch in consultation with my eager cousins and the shopkeeper's hearty conversations.

Sometimes, I noticed match sticks, lighting *dhup* or fragrance sticks, and bells from faith-based practices, and one day saw a murti or statue of goddesses being escorted down the street with people dancing and playing music and drums, to greet, among many festivities!

My cousins would study all day at school and then have well-informed tutors at home, to whom they served some tea and toast, or biscuits while they worked through math books that were boring, filled with numbers, examples, and calculations, yet no illustrations. I contemplated a lot about the fact that they were studying math a few grades higher than me, even when in the same grade. I studied a little more after that, and was placed into engineering math levels, for college math placement exams. Consequently, I forgot to go to class and failed. Don't worry, eventually, I went back and studied some Calculus for fun for no good reason, and given the incident, eventually got the analogy about dummy variables, and kept mutually dumping people who thought of me as a viable alternate to their future wives. Hence, I had enough time to add two graduate degrees on my resume.

My parents' review of my report cards, in grade school, kept me humble. I often worked hard, and then would proudly share as a 7-year-old that I had ended up getting an "A- "or a score of 91 out of 100 points. "Baki dhuto point kothai galo?" my father would seriously ask me! In other words, "What happened to the other two points that would have earned you an A?" My parents, with typically high expectations, attended parent teacher conferences and would jointly study and review my teacher's comments from a multiple selection box, about my work: "Meets potential." or "Works to Capacity." and sometimes, "A joy to have in class." I

loved these comments! Plus, conduct and effort was evaluated additionally, numbered on a likert scale of 1 to 4, scores often of a "1" being the highest level one could earn in these categories, and sprinkled with an occasional "2".

Anyways, in our youth, my cousins would run to catch the bus, an overcrowded bus, of course, from a crowded street, polluted, in uniforms and tiffins of food packed. Sometimes, I would greet them on their way home and once again get crispy rice or *muri* mixed with spices, and this time, cucumbers and peanuts with some salt and pepper. This time, the *ludo* game they gifted me was a convenient travel size kind, with cheap plastic *gooti* and a dice piled up in a small cylindrical tube the size of a USB drive. On the weekend, my family would get hot sweets and samosas for tea. Life was delicious and I missed my American friends when I opened my colorful textbooks and was thankful even though carrying books was heavy on trips like that.

With social studies as one of my favorite subjects, I'm convinced now, with my education and experiences, that in the aftermath of technology and re-establishing the standards of global agencies for human rights, and both health and education standards, that goals or priorities now includes understanding about who is reasonable to work with or not. Some characteristics of moral fortitude as goals are not achieved when resources are

from scarcity perspectives, and one grows up with a glass-half-empty philosophy that leads one to compete with one's own family, friends, and country because one thinks one is not respected due to class-displaced societies or lack of opportunity. That disadvantaged outlook leaves people susceptible to various levels of intent and motivation especially when they are basically good people not aware of who might try to manipulate them or what they themselves might cause as an intrusion to someone else.

As sociable a child, as I was, I struggled with the vocabulary in my immature days to process and comprehend micro-inequities, discriminatory attitudes, and social bullying, to find help sometimes, to explain to others about the individuals who bothered me or anyone else growing up. Although their parents were a certain way, the individuals who had a behavior problem, sometimes simply known as adolescence, to a few, had influences themselves possibly due to a technological or behavior challenging set of events in their own lives. These issues stemmed from the dynamic equation of balancing either overly extended practice of self-control, lack thereof, or resolving structural oppression through education as a path out of poverty and coping with other disadvantages through healthful choices, other alternatives, or maintaining the counterfactual, or status quo.

Otherwise, mental health counseling was likely offered indirectly through community support and extended family members and community members who would discuss and sometimes admonish others, so people did not feel intruded upon with more challenging, inappropriate offers while experiencing more benign resilience building opportunities. Suffice it to say, as anyone might seek to understand how best to relate to their surroundings, at times, I might temporarily feel affected, retort my disagreement, and then walk away. I was just not interested in certain people, places, or things, and tried to resolve all these perplexing issues pensively.

Furthermore, I was interested and carefully thoughtful about what made me different in a classrooms where the majority of my friends looked different than me, and I would experience bicultural weekend events that helped me to sort through concepts about race, age, gender, or disability and health, language, faith based practices, and more!

As I mentioned, sometimes mild arguments or just walking away or chatting with other friends helped. Coping with these obstacles could be intimidating, at times, yet ultimately, the walk away or confrontation strategy was applied, and mothers talked, and the fathers were informed, and the situations were addressed eventually for each person, or at least once vocabulary had been

attained to even have a discussion, any upset was dealt with through talking, some space and resolve!

In junior high we celebrated global cultures with booths set up in the cafeteria space transformed into our thoughtful and fun presentations. We also celebrated earth day with posters on the walls of our drawings about concepts like recycling plastic bottles by placing them in the proper trash bins, and planting trees, and caring about animals.

While exploring multicultural neighborhoods and festivals, growing up, many friends sought to balance identity amidst assimilation, or cultural self-acceptance, negotiations with immediate family and educators. The public service announcements depended heavily on the advent of music CDs and videos, to get their message across. For a child who was growing up in a classroom, just beginning to get access to computers and cable television, there was suddenly a lot more to consider about what was considered our immediate and accessible setting. The influences included moments of Bollywood actors and actresses running through a European forest for a while, and then, on a moment's notice, before the song had ended, also making their way across a snow-covered mountain setting in another country. Similarly, we watched program about our local history as well from

various eras of time as well and learned about concepts of race and gender and related U.S. settings across time.

I was fortunate to have a strong healthy childhood, yet sometimes faced one obstacle after another, which I turned away from, at first, as a 4-year-old in 1982, even though many people thought I was younger than that according to my passport. With whatever words I could muster, I told my mother, of my conflict, and she told my father, and we got intervention support for what had resulted in allergic reactions to my skin, ear drops for my ears, and a very large spear that seemed native American, and I took my stance for a photo with a finger in my open mouth to display my dramatic disapproval of the visitors from yet another similarly named family who would playfully pinch me and sometimes in a mean way once or twice. I have no idea why I did not want them to move to Bangalore, India, when we were in elementary school. I visited them when I was nine years old, in India and I thought their behavior and my own had also improved with a mud pie recipe made from the dirt in the flowerpots as we struggled to find something useful to do out on their balcony.

When we actually went to visit that family in Bangalore, India, my then toddler-age brother was suffering from upset from having eaten too much at the zoo or something else when we visited Kovalam Beach, a beautiful place with crystal-clean water. I

stood knee-deep and could see my toes, and I was able to collect shells. Later, my brother, once again, got diarrhea from consuming too much rice, lentils, and additionally, ice cream and masala.

However, the problem could have been from the older kids who overheard the story of me, as a 7-year-old, singing to him as an infant, so happy to have a younger brother and pre-planning arrangement of his future wedding prospects, way ahead of anyone else's typical and jovial scheming! My melody included various rhyming phrases and accidentally and inadvertently saying he would marry instead of a nice girl or whomever, "me" as a placeholder, in the midst of my misspoken, original and impromptu song.

As an elementary school age child, I was not sure if I was interested in anyone romantically at that time, other than my future prom date and or possibly his friend, and whoever else would dance to the disco albums or much prized music of those days of Disco Dancing Diwani style fun!

Plus, I needed an audience from school for my tap dancing with clickety clackety awesome shoes with tags or ribbons. Ballet was alright but I like the sound of tap shoes better. My friends loved to dance as well, and we would have dancing competitions at various venues. They were really good at this, and the music was superb to accompany our endeavors, especially when we got to jazz

lessons. Later, a few of us who had many kinds of art hobbies, also had an opportunity to participate in the well-designed shape shifting transformations of Indian modern dancing as well.

Then, at least two more incidents of chaos happened after my return from a 5th and 6th grade trip to and from India:

One, I fell on my 4-year-old brother and felt awkward and got back up. Phew, no problem. I was 10 or 11 years old. People reacted by cheering for my good upbringing, and others were disappointed that they did not see any misbehavior by someone blessed with chandan and sindhur from loved ones and faith-based support; the vermillion was a red-orange hue powder for decoration and blessings.

Two, I was confused about healthy relationships and started to reflect about my childhood affiliation by somewhat unfamiliar teenage males having difficulty with their behaviors, I mean, adolescence. Now I realize, where did I ever get an idea like that, never before seen? People were growing up and had a lot of mishaps along the way because they did not know who to talk with until health education was introduced in schools and eventually normalizing this conversation for our parents.

Well, my 4-year-old younger brother nodded in unsuspecting agreement, before I proceeded to act like a rodeo star, thrown off

track by prior influences, who also had tough times. All this happened before I could understand or express with any slowly emerging vocabulary, what was happening with my own body, as a tall and naïve 10 or 11-year-old child myself.

Realizing my misbehavior, I scaffolded myself into better behavior as I immersed myself in stories of good characters I identified with, in books, movies, and television, and sometimes children's magazines.

Typically, I was a naïve youth who would more normally hug and comfort my life-sized new teddy bear to sleep. My parents would pat me to bed appropriately because my arm and leg muscles used to ache a lot from running around outside all day and eventually over hurdles for which I held the school record for a week or so. The pediatric office suggested a bath with mild soap for my sensitive skin allergies, and my parents and I were so thankful to be understood amidst other people's mental problems or intrusions that they experienced, which had also somewhat sparingly affected my life. Thereafter, I learned and grew with good support as needed along the way.

Well emerging out of 5th grade, I didn't even have a female training top yet, nor a camisole with built in support, or anything other than a sparing clue, trying to figure out what those teenage boys were trying to accomplish with me. I was grossed out at the

idea of sticking my own hands in anyone's anywhere after the mishaps of my earlier experiences. Other people in college were having regular interactions of dating behavior, physicality progressions included whatever the choice of that level of interaction mutually consented, using the examples of their parents' guidance or otherwise. I now realize some people were comfortable sticking their hands in various places.

I sorted through how I identified or related to others with nonexistent role models of similar race ethnicity on television programs in the western USA setting of the 1980s. I later realized my parents had security cameras hidden at both houses, basically extended family and neighbors, of all race ethnicities and they simply gave me space to figure out with a forgiving brother who did not actually participate in my nonsense, but rather just let me act like a fool. The wrong behavior was realized very remorsefully as I read other stories of morality gifted to me about good girls and good boys that likely came from the 1960s, and I happened to find a candy red color book chapter about etiquette in an encyclopedia set that I relied on for my homework and eventually started to give myself my own assignments. We had support from pediatricians' offices and our parents as well no matter what the issue was. At least we would weather the admonishments or lectures knowing that eventually we would be okay.

Not only did I also find a book about A-B-C, well, good for my parents to have an intellectual book about THAT, placed backward on the shelf, of course, so obviously, I would find it. I had a children's health book about how the body grows, which I shared with all my classmates in first grade because there was an anatomy drawing of a male and female on one of the pages, and I was trying to make sense of this important discovery with similarly aged classroom comrades. Eventually, we had a health education segment in school about growing up. A video display was presented in our classroom, which was really smart for the teachers and parents to provide, yet totally uncomfortable and awkward for many of us as students. Maybe the books were more interesting, or we just were still naive and learning words and references to prepare us for health education, more specifically, sex education and the qualities of healthy relationships in later grades. A topic that would eventually be much discussed in 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, and I think 10th grade until we all eventually chose to accept maybe we were actually growing up.

I had a few dolls, though, to help me figure this out until then. Among them was a preemie, which came with adoption papers in the toy box. I was 7 years old and imitated my mother, when possible, for clothing the baby and changing diapers.

When my younger brother would cry in his crib at night on the other side of the wall from where I slept in the adjacent room, I would thoughtfully go get him out from his designated place and dump him right into my parents' room, in the midst of their slumber, and say, "Here. take care of this baby, he's crying." They were thankful, I'm sure, and I could sleep peacefully again back in my own room, which I was lucky to have!

I was thankful for my room and for the toys. All was well, except for a green unknown visitor who I was quite sure was in my closet at night, and later turned out to be another acquaintance visiting unexpectedly. Yet, I loved the programs on TV about men that turned into green monsters and good and bad advice to follow and read all my fairy tales with the hopes of finding the prince until I got older and realized what a player those assumed to be Princes were!

Given this is a story about growing up, I can share with you that like everyone else, there were times when I didn't have control of my body during emerging adolescence. I was so proud of my parents for placing me in sports and dance programs and talking with me about how the body worked and good art projects that helped me have a way to cope with what I was going through even though, at the time, I didn't know that was a buffer or useful in any way.

I was still waiting to date significantly until I was older, corroborated by an honest conversation with my parents and a body check at the pediatrician's office, especially when I had said crazy things that I must have indirectly overheard from other people one day. I only ever took multivitamins and had good nutrition, and was a well-adjusted and healthy child, but had a lot of interesting influences. So, I started studying health topics on my own in 6th grade and made notes with a big red scrapbook. I started to review with encyclopedias and thought when I fell off my bike three times, breaking too strongly on the strewn about sand, that maybe tuberculosis was relevant to know about. I also had learned through my study and travel experiences to prevent mosquito bites with a net and night called a *moshari*.

I then watched soap operas secretly, and liked guys, however, one day kissed a female, and did not like it at all. She was supposed to be a comrade also; however, I asked permission and didn't expect a rejection of my acting like a vacuum cleaner on her face. Her parents stormed in, and I was just so frustrated. I was nonjudgemental of everyone trying to navigate these issues.

Then, while working on an art project on the floor of the study room, I realized my monthly cycle had started, during a typical time, and I told my mother about this even then, one summer before 7th grade, in junior high. These issues might start with the

right match somewhere out there, for comraderies, somewhere in life aligning to transitions as well, however, do not actually start necessarily from physical interactions in proximity. With healthy hormones for getting tall and getting my female parts in working order, my mother and I went running up the stairs, embarrassingly for me and got cleaned up, and I hated having to wear diapers again. I tried a small cotton cylindrical "plug", approximately one to two inches in length, as well, but could not get it to work properly in USA or France. I even wore the diaper beneath a leotard during the summer dance class and was so thankful for properly sympathetic friends. It was awful to figure out life before tampon usage in college. I had to say no to advances multiple times when in college. The guys at the time would inquire if the girls were "experienced" or not and consequently, I was either not dateable, or on the other hand, once we figured out dating etiquette, waiting to date significantly again was actually expected by the time it was time to settle down! Sometimes just dating intermittently and taking time for oneself in a balanced way is healthy for anyone.

I am sending some of the people I know metaphorically to a math class about logic that I skipped because sometimes, like anyone else, I am still trying to figure this out, and that's okay. By college, I had three inspections of my female parts at the women's health office, including for tampon usage, which has nothing to do with significantly dating or any particular levels of chastity until a

typical age of transition in relationship. Men should compare their parts to a tampon's size and be rest assured and comforted.

Dating begins, in a rumored setting to be in the range of 16 years of age, plus or minus 4 years, with incremental informed consent, especially for youth and young adults in western countries. Finally, I realized a few of the guys in college knew of me, before I had met them, and just wanted to know beyond arranged dating or social support, or simple networking, if they were an intervention for my ignorance or innocence or problems at that point. One of the guys was dating someone else also, and when the relationship ended, he had a third girl's photo up in a frame in his dorm room. Complications ensued, and I thought no one would marry me and I left anyway. Then I found out a lot of people were trying to marry me and for the wrong reasons, so I dumped them all. Mostly I was busy studying Human Development and Family Studies, Psychology and disability studies, Child Development and Public Policy. No one actually wants these details; however, they want evidence-based results! I prioritized being valued for my work, and not because of relationship status. Healthy relationships and friendships are important to me and we all grow for a readiness towards a healthful relationship, at various paces towards these natural life experiences.

In the quest for what is an acceptable level of human development, if that should even be a question, how much utilization of technology a society depends on what may seem to result in whether or not to depend on more machinery or not while preserving sustainable goods and services and their exchange dependent on the resource buckets of goods from the country produced within the country or abroad. For example, I have seen bulldozers in India right next to many construction workers and the question is do the workers keep their employment or lose with the addition of advances of technology? Do workers get redirected to advanced training that they don't want or is that a desirable alternative to manual labor? I had the opportunity to learn when advancements can jointly improve public health by visiting university programs for village workers' continuing education. Maybe the power for human development is simply having a good number of people with good character nonjudgemental and who have reached a consensus on their philosophy, emerged both from the environment of those around us and from within, who care about one another and providing social support in the community!

Relationships and economic capability are associated with overcoming a variety of obstacles, like personality, motivation, sensibilities, and basic attainment of professional business casual attire or weekend gym clothes given our goal-oriented ways. When two income households resulted as a way to meet the increase in

the cost-of-living standards, in many places, locally and globally, this economic situation aligned well with various movements, from civil rights to women more often in the workforce. The participation of more women than before in various industries of work, family and social policies also result in how to cope with poverty, divorce, or divorce and then poverty. Often times, it became everyone's business and responsibility to explore how to support childcare. Of course, when public health goals emerged for healthier relationships, people still had to deal with how to deal with relationships and economic attainment for basic needs like paying rent. Simultaneously, it seems as though many people, both men and women, also sought to delay marriage in order to attain the professional requirements for job demands. Therefore, higher education platforms of both undergraduate and graduate study, were attended finally by a diverse group of both males and females. Consequently, there was a contradictory dilemma of being a power couple or being too educated to be considered for supporting someone else's career.

Applying healthy boundaries and transitioning from extended family households to typically four person households is an ongoing effort for anyone. When families then moved or visited our house in America or even when they immigrated after my parents did, there were many adjustments that had to be sorted through beyond just assimilation and acculturation. How did we

all adapt? Both parents and children from each side of our unexpected enmeshment? The opportunity to offset obstacles in the pathway to healthful and conscientious living is important.

Even in English, however, some people were unaware of things that I realized as a kid with toy aisle purchases of "mystery" pens with ink that only show up with food coloring from coloring books and toys, which made me think, wait a second, I can choose my own adventure! I could psychoanalyze and philosophize these ideas more often eventually as long as I would be informed of risks and benefits and have well-educated comrades to resolve the situations with respect to our global and local rights. In travels, from USA to India, people from various income levels in India, especially in villages, shared with me, the analogy of a wheelbarrow. That the wheeled item is balanced by both wheels on the cart working together, a metaphor for males and females to working by relating to one another for the respected mutual need of both resulting in a symbiotic and healthy collaboration with one another. Speaking of wheels, after the agricultural transition to the industrial era, a variety of *charka or spinning wheel,* inspired textiles and farming goods were available to ongoing recent times that I got to see when I travelled in north India for the making of fabric designs on looms. These products were then transported and marketed across many countries. I learned both through in person visits to historical sites in India and study that the charka helped

produce self-reliance as a goal during nonviolence socio political movements to change ruling structures. Factory review of how much quantity and quality was actually in demand compared to overworked manufacturers deserved better management as well.

That said, would more technology really be necessary for the output of goods and services to resolve societal problems, and how much of anything is actually in demand for what purpose if our goal in society is to have mutually beneficial achievement of health, education, knowledge, family social support, and communications about public service announcements that better our awareness, and inform our choices, towards excellent character?

Furthermore, where are the traveling markets going to go next? Will taxi driver businesses imported from foreign lands to America be replaced by a lesser known manager elsewhere? Would an exhibit at a museum or bookstore offering the most economical metaphorical travel to other places be susceptible to malfunctions resulting in never reaching the places we intended to go?

Traffic jams caused by either poor planning or unanticipated events can result in many issues. However, from another era of time feudal systems do not necessarily result in conflict unless the right amount of tax accounts for supporting everyone, including programs and services for both the elderly and those with new parenting responsibilities. However, for the purposes of affording

welfare programs, aren't a reasonable amount taxes necessary, otherwise, if there are too many taxes, how can we afford to participate in a dynamic market and pay for anything, like dinner or fair-trade coffee unless one is lucky to live in a sales tax-free zone in USA? And there should be choice in the levels of program utilization anyways so that we maintain a healthy competitive marketing methodology encouraging offers of better-quality products and services anyways.

And now, after a few hides and seek games, people might refer to me as a Ph.D. level social science researcher or program manager with a few art hobbies. Thank you to everyone for my learning experiences, and with apologies as well. I hope to be a healthy support for both myself and others now with aging parents, a comrade of a sibling who is now a grown up, a banker by profession, and writing poetry, running out of gas in the wilderness sometimes, among other ordeals. Being the older sibling, this is my responsibility to let others know; however, otherwise, encourage healthy relationships and good stories through informed consent, assent, and support for resolving reasonable obstacle courses toward strength and resilience. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Pialee Roy, Ph.D.

Part One

Coffee Toffee Table Talk

One cool autumn evening, in the artsy and academic college town of a suburb in Massachusetts, I was trying to fastidiously write down detailed notes on my college ruled planner, color coded and scribbled in with pencil, in case I made an obvious mistake. Amidst public health work messages, work outs, leisure activities, movies from the central train stop, and Indian classical singing classes, I was planning a trip to a boat race! This was common on the ocean in the Summer, and on the river with crew or sailboats in the Fall. Strolling by these watersides, going to the museums and restaurants in the vicinity, were always welcome excursions!

In 8th grade, getting to Boston, was a thirty five mile drive, in traffic, on the highway, and reaching our destination was highly dependent on whether or not my mother was speedily and expertly driving. Anyways, I was thankful for the impatient driving because often times I was being admonished for something or being offered unsolicited advice, with nowhere else to go to for those 65 minutes. Thankfully, the lectures subsided for awhile when I won a prized trip for whale watching, on the ocean by the city, finally earning student of the month. The certificate was presented by my elementary school principal, who was visiting me and my family and teacher during the junior high school event. This was a nice surprise. She had the best rewards for me when I was younger, for good grades and handling an ambulance visit well during recess games, tag, softball, fire drills, and music medley efforts, along with

double dutch jump rope efforts, on the paved blacktop driveways. My mom would pack me green grapes, fudge cookies, and sandwiches to cover the day's scheduled activities. In the principal's classroom we could select a toy or stickers from the well secured file cabinet if we got a good grade. We liked these prizes and rewards a lot and the whale watching trip was a humbling experience which simultaneously had a motivating and rhythmically calming effect.

During my mid-20s, having just returned to the Boston area after undergraduate study in Delaware, the boat race was taking place that weekend sponsored by area businesses, and of no cost to the attendees, thankfully. I wanted good company to attend and was trying to figure out who to call and chat with on an otherwise typical Friday, on my own, after a busy workweek. With the competing activity list of things to do including deciding, what to order for dinner, I resorted to the "go-to", pizza and a glass of wine.

Close by was Punjabi *thalas* or metal flat plates of spicy food, and Pad Thai down the stairs from a small walkway, where my car had been towed within less than 5 minutes upon going to get a $12 pizza which ended up costing me $135 to pay for my car's return from the tow truck dump, a short taxi trip away with whatever funds I had left at the time! Anyways, the possibility of weekend *dosas*, savory crepe like and potato filled with coconut chutney

sauce on the side, and a movie hall trip with ethnic grocery stores within the town, was another good choice, and, of course, meat and vegetable tapas from the Spanish restaurant, or guacamole and nachos made with lemon, by request, from a gourmet Mexican restaurant by another local square. Everyone seemed so busy, however, a few of us finally arranged our schedules and enjoyed the boats from various places, and their colorful sales on the ocean, that weekend!

There was much to enjoy about diversity in my adventures which I am thankful for. One evening we went to an Ethiopian restaurant and were interested to learn the tradition of sharing a large singular plate of food, with each persons' individualized section not overly running into anyone else's. In Indian culture, individualized plates were more customary, and sometimes, the more important the guest, the more plates and bowls for various dishes! We enjoyed the food and the atmosphere of all these places just fine. Traditions that were similar amongst these places had more to do with what I previously thought was another kind of "standard time", running late to meetings because we cared to learn the goings on of the most recent news happening in a neighborhood somewhere. Apparently Western stringent schedules or even other cultures that expect one to arrive 15 minutes early can take a lot of adjustment, if any!

I liked the opportunity to meet people from various places. In travels, coursework at universities was supplemental to the experiences. I have learned about health care and education programming that showcases how study abroad programming brings many people and cultures together. Professors and students I have worked with may have been, at times, from the Middle East, or places in Africa, or Europe, the UK, and East Asian countries as well, and of course a diverse array of policies that are evolving according to the socio-political-economic climate. The students often have great ideas in conversational exchange for how plans do or do not work out due to a variety of support or obstacles to relationship building customs, leadership, or local opportunities for growth, innovation, entrepreneurship, and voting rights. These aspects of life are important to almost everyone.

When I graduated college, as a psychology and human development and family studies major, I was idealistic about my plans having just been accepted at a Massachusetts university for my Master's degree to learn more about effective programs and policies serving children and families. Eventually I ran out of funds for my side hobbies, motivated by a leather jacket and a warm sounding acoustic guitar, purchased with funds from my last paycheck. I was working at a health center as a discharge planner for the after care of people who left the place, and who sought social

support in the community. Eventually I learned more about how important social support actually was. After two years of graduate school coursework, thesis writing was on hold. The database had crashed along with everyone's work, and the professors had left on sabbatical, and we were perplexed for a while, yet happily fulfilled with salads, pet dogs, and very good playlists to chat about conference poster planning, until guidance returned. I ran out of funds for extras, and my father was in the hospital after a heart attack, and I was worried about driving to visit him and keep him company during his recovery. Eventually, I cried from the overwhelm and because I couldn't afford to learn any more than 4 chords on the guitar at my lessons, a nice place with very talented people, and a nice stroll from there to my gym next to both donuts and ice-cream.

In happier news, however, I had just seen my friend, Raja, on television, in a stereotypical role with a beard, and decided to call to congratulate him. After a few minutes of friendly banter, I decided to broach the topic of asking for advice about how to record my hobby, my four-chord strums on music software that I just bought. This enthusiasm was squashed, with the evasive response, of topic changes, to other conversations. I responded with understanding, "Oh, you have to go, alright, have fun with your new art project, maybe I'll try to attend some time! And I'll bring friends."

I ate my pizza, and then sauntered over to do some writing on my thesis instead.

Suffice it to say, I, Padma Sherni, had another good idea earlier tonight, and then the phone rang again, and within a second, the lampshade on the lamp on the table across the room fell and directed my gaze to the overcrowded bookshelf.

I answered, thinking possibly that it was a call back from my friend, with a change of agenda. Instead, it was Rose Vernice, a practical and cheery undergraduate student dutifully completing her homework, unlike my procrastinating tendencies. She was a psychology major also, learning how to complete assessments including inkblot tests which included abstract paintings that one would guess the image of and apparently the association rather than prior imprinting influence or priming would categorize one's personality to be culturally relevant to someone else's alignment with previously unfamiliar paintings.

Rose Vernice stated, "Hi! I'm ready to start my interview for my college assignment now, if you're free. As I mentioned before, we have to talk with someone who is from an immigrant family."

Rose Vernice was an auburn-haired gregarious female with glasses who was acquaintance from a close by university who had

approached me through message box the prior week from an online resume platform.

I was delighted yet started to hesitate, "I don't mean to question the purpose of your assignment in particular, since we are acquainted from class and work, however, why not just befriend someone and build a relationship over events and activities rather than approach a person like a museum artifact?"

After thinking through my inquisitive effort for clarification, Rose Vernice responded, "I think the practice is to help others reflect upon their life and to learn about other cultures." I responded, "We already do that. We meditate or have a prayer for everything. I just wonder how many people working on their class assignments will make the effort again, when the course is over. "

Rose Vernice responded with reassurance, "Well, we at least can certainly meet up for coffee or tea next week, however, you're right, I am not sure what others will do." Encouraged, I stated, "Okay, this could be fun! Let's try. I am thankful you are interested in my story. Just wanted to share my ponderance in that moment."

Rose Vernice thoughtfully stated, "Thank you for letting me know, it's something to certainly work on. If you don't feel comfortable with the interview questions at any time, please feel free to let me know and we can discontinue at any time without any

risk to your affiliations with work or school. Do you have any questions?" I responded, "Thank you for explaining that. I think I am all set." Rose Vernice proceeded to share the questions, and I jotted them down.

At least there was guidance in getting to know people for the younger generation. Was it any better among adults? Perhaps the international travelers know better however not everyone can afford to even travel out of state, time wise, inclination wise, or emotionally prepare and it is that much more daunting to explain for children of immigrant families, why the practice is very important.

My metaphorical halo of friends, family, and community, as well as my own lessons learned, protects me when I curiously explore life and the one light many lamps philosophy. During the past week, I was reading a beautiful book of poetry that I randomly discovered on the bookshelf, a book by Tagore which makes me smile and laugh to think of so many different perspectives about life... I kept a journal of my musings. For example:

Journal Entry:

Coffee Toffee Table Talk: What Do You Think?

1. Who gets to choose the music or radio station in the car – the driver or the passenger? What if the passenger chooses music that is distracting to the driver? What if the passenger is made to feel devalued in an imbalance of power because they cannot control the driving or the music? How much time is it reasonable to experience this?
2. How do women in India drive a bicycle wearing a sari? That amazes me. How do women in America drive a bicycle wearing only a bikini? That also amazes me. Either way, both women should wear helmets.
3. When and why did women start dieting? When and why did women start exercising? When and why did women stop wearing corsets, and when did women start wearing modern, tighter outfit gear?
4. Why do people go on a cruise to swim in a pool on a boat while they are in the middle of the ocean? That is true, but when did people expend so much energy getting off the boat only to reconsider this as a luxury?

However, an actual reflection on my life experiences was a rare opportunity, and this student's assignment was a good reason to think things through. As I mentioned, during the prior week, Rose Vernice described to me over the phone her list of questions for the interview assignment. I took some time to reflect and could imagine her asking the questions as if she were in the same office space. These are my reflections below as I jotted them down in my journal:

Rose Vernice: Okay, where are you from? Your family? Did you travel by boat?

Padma Sherni: I was born in the USA. My parents are from India. What do you suppose my personality would be like? I have diverse family and friends from all over the world and from all walks of life that not even an open inkblot test of artwork could surmise or capture the whole of my characteristics or influences.

Rose Vernice: What was college like for you?

Padma Sherni: I think back to my college days when I used to imbibe cappuccino mocha ice coffee swirled with ice cream scoops and tried to study notes on flashcards especially for my course on Logic. A good friend from Australia, who I used to spend time with at the coffee shop, wanted to make sure when he saw my flashcards that I was not cheating. I was offended. Although he was also a

student, he had never seen anyone study with flashcards before. Due to other priorities, I avoided studying too much for this class. However, later, my brother gifted me an entire book about how to be more logical, ha ha. So, although I never got a good grade in that math class for logic, I still recall what tautology is and made my point that I was, in fact, not cheating. More importantly, I was getting myself "edumacated" about love and friendships and that balance of independence and interdependence every college student goes through as they evolve from their life with their parents to their own way of being. And to answer my dad's question, the other time, I really was in the library and that building really does stay open late. Fortunately, I did not have to answer that question again later, as I may have possibly been in a conundrum as to how to explain my whereabouts. That balance of personal evolvement and independence and attachment to family or societal obligations and relationship expectations is often a struggle in emerging adulthood, especially for women of any descent.

Rose Vernice: Have you always lived in New England?

Padma Sherni: I went to college in Delaware although I was born and brought up in the area of Boston, Massachusetts. I lived in Massachusetts until 1995 and only moved from Boston to Delaware because of my dad's job when I was approximately 18 years old. I

went reluctantly because I love Boston: the skyline, the restaurants, the diversity, the walking trails, and the sailboats on the Charles River.

If I had stayed in Boston, the scholarship I was offered for a school of physical therapy would have resolved my financial dilemma, at least for the first year, as I strived for my independence.

However, the college tuition was more affordable in Delaware, and my parents wanted me to stay closer to my new "home," so I was required to apply, at the last minute, to a university closer to them. Fortunately for them, I was accepted just before orientation and classes started. If I was smarter, I should have thought to mess up the application process, but I did not think of this brilliant idea until just this second 18 years too late.

My mother probably just wanted to be hawk eyes at me for my whereabouts and so after I was accepted, I had to go to De-la-where? And eventually my mother's job was literally down the street from my dorm room. My mother's employment location at the time then presented one more challenge on the journey to my freedom and independence as a strong-willed Indian American female growing up in the USA.

I somehow managed to get through life and school during the last few college years with some help from friends in a similar boat.

Rose Vernice: What place did you like better, Massachusetts or Delaware? What were you studying?

Padma Sherni: As I had mentioned, I had never wanted to leave Boston, and that was, at the time, the toughest decision of my life. I used to go for runs around campus just to figure out how or when I was going to get back to my hometown or if I should stay where I was. I was the only one famished at 8am after a run and calling any of my friends to see if they wanted to get breakfast in the cafeteria. "Padma Sherni, we're still sleeping. You go." Thank goodness for the all-you-can-eat buffet, and yet miraculously, I still had a good metabolism to maintain a strong core because I used to dance all the time.

At the end of my first year although I was achieving just what I wanted to, I struggled with my decision to continue to pursue a physical therapy course of study.

Rose Vernice: How did your parents or others react to that?

Padma Sherni: Others felt this indecision was not good enough and demanded that I go home to refocus my energy and efforts. I said, "No. Watch and wait. I will figure this out." At the end of my

second year, I was achieving just what I wanted, yet others felt this was still not enough and demanded that I go home. I said, "No.". Then, my provisions and money for on-campus housing ran out, and I marched over to the local community center and got a job to work at an after-school program. I paid my own residence bill and found out that I loved that feeling of financial freedom, independence, and self-reliance. This was very important to me as a woman continuing to grow into my adulthood.

Someone I dated during my first year must have understood this need, as I reflect with sarcasm, once when we went out for dinner. He would conveniently forget his wallet, and I would end up paying for both of us. Consequently, this meeting did not evolve significantly. Ha ha. Then again, I had been brainwashed about gender roles in the way many people are still in a tug of war about this, and therefore, my friends, both male and female, were critical of that incident. I now look at that dinner with empowerment and yet have personal rules and expectations for dating etiquette which I will not divulge yet.

Rose Vernice: Do you feel you have an east-west mixed approach to that sort of thing? You know, dating?

Padma Sherni: As an Indian American, the sometimes-conflicting guidance and advice from at least two cultures have been both

confusing and amusing. The summer before high school, I signed up for basketball camp. I love basketball even though I'm not all that talented in the hoop sport. I had only ever played in the challenging level of athletics, for the first time in my life, in 8th grade gym class. I learned how to play well, however. Still, I was mortified to then realize that I would be the only girl attending a supposedly coed summer camp the year after.

Padma Sherni: I was among approximately 15 guys I mostly didn't know. I was also the only brown person. My dad reminded me that I had a level head and encouraged me and reassured me that I would be just fine to get through the sports opportunity. So, after years of hearing the mantra, "Don't talk to boys. Go study." The rules had suddenly changed and yet not really. It is a fine balance that many females growing up can identify with. (I was not really sure I wanted this opportunity because I already had a very specific daydream to pursue a guy, I had a crush on from Boston. He was not on the basketball team in any school district, but I liked him anyway. I decided to keep myself busy until I got to see him again.

So, I went to the basketball camp, just to see what would happen. During three-on-three scrimmages, the guys would sometimes stop and politely hand me the ball. I eventually asked them to pass me the ball without knocking me over. This was pretty funny when I think about it now. They would devour donuts and

soda during the breaks, and I was in the midst of trying to figure out if I was supposed to wear more makeup or not. From my perspective, there was no helpful person to really get advice from who had been through a similar life experience yet, in the whole history of the United States of America!

Anyway, I got through camp and then made the freshman basketball team in high school. My mother didn't understand that attending practices was not optional, though. "Study! No boys. Study!" she recommended with emphasis. I protested, "But mom! Dad said that I have a level head, and then Mom would double check for corroboration with my dad, with a strong warning in her tone of voice, "AY!!!! Shuncho??!!" and consequently inquired, "What on earth was this impractical idea for a girl her age?" Consequently, my basketball career ended. I'm embellishing slightly, but you get the point. This is not too far off from what actually happened.

Rose Vernice: Alright, so now, are you going to share more about your dating philosophy? Laughing…

Padma Sherni: Okay, now after reflecting upon some of my earlier days and first year of college, I'm ready to tell you about my personal preferences about dating etiquette. Let's start with a side note about paying the bill. Please don't stress me out with the fancy

everything and restaurant and all that the first time around because I'll have my jazz hands up and crossed in front of me the entire time. (I learned excellent defense and offense from basketball camp.) Just let's go and meet up somewhere, maybe for coffee, where I can, or you can run screaming in the opposite direction if needed after politely backing away after an hour or so if all is not going so well. However, all bells and whistles if this is for real the next time after and this will be your responsibility as my partner who has asked to spend time with me to treat. Then, I like taking turns leading and following and sharing in the responsibility of treats thereafter if you're genuine. (This is what I have figured out from high school to the first to the second year of college or so until now with increasingly earned privileges.) If you have anything other than genuine intentions towards me, you will have me, my sisters and brothers, my surrogate sisters and brothers, and a whole bunch of other people I don't even know who are already intruding into my life, because I am a female who is brown, who will then have a new agenda of trying to identify you for some type of consequence. I am not responsible for what happens to you after that.

I learned a lot in my second year in ways you wouldn't have expected by spending more time getting to know other students everywhere, and this was so much fun! And I was smart enough to choose the dorm with the walk-in closet.

And an antique piano. And no boys as residents in this building. The college residence was pristine and lovely.

Rose Vernice: How was that experience of living on campus?

Padma Sherni: That was the best decision of my life at that time. Of course, as President of the student government for the women's dorm, I made sure there were opportunities to have socials, among other events, and let people enjoy their free life in good company as they chose. Staying in the residence hall costs a lot of money. The job I had was good but did not pay enough to meet my living costs on campus. I eventually ran out of funds from the after-school program I worked at for the community center. So, when the employment had ended, I had to go home.

During this transition time, I then decided at the end of my second year of college that I no longer wanted to be a physical therapist, and I dropped my major. I was tired of looking at cells. "When are we going to get to muscles?!" I thought. To make my decision and to volunteer time in community service, I helped the elderly who had multiple sclerosis in an aqua-size therapy program. I got into the pool even though I still couldn't really swim because I wanted to help them out and learn. Plus, I thought the idea was a good one, not only for them but also to make sure that I could at least float in water.

Rose Vernice: Now, how did your parents react to your changing your major course of study?

Padma Sherni: My parents were very concerned when I told them about changing my major. When I had a vague idea of subjects that interested me more, like the whole person in the context of their socio-ecological environment comprised of interdependent systems, I thought, "Yes, I'll change my major." My parents' overprotective reaction was less confident at the time, "What on earth are you talking about?!" "Will you still be a type of doctor in the medical field?" "What kind of job will you get?" So again, I had to strive harder for my goals regardless of whether or not others understood. I knew after observing toddlers trying to problem solve with their still growing vocabulary and motor skills that there was something a lot more important to me than just mitosis and meiosis alone or the citric acid cycle or Krebs cycle.

My parents just wanted to make sure that after all their sacrifices to offer their children more opportunities to achieve their dreams, taking an atypical route would still ensure success. For my parents, and fortunately for me, the definition of success included that we were happy, resilient, and able to support ourselves and others. They never barked orders except in loving, convincing ways, and this goes back and forth in a way that only someone like me could truly discern for others as to what is a literal disciplinary

consequence to testing limits, versus a reprimand. The corroboration with one another regarding a need for a consequence usually began with reference to each other: "Ay! Shuncho?" followed by some metaphorical figure of speech in a Shakespearean level of an Indian language that was way over my head. For many years, all I needed to comprehend was the tone that I was definitely in trouble for something (that, as usual, most likely, was not my fault.).

After three more years of college studies after my sophomore year, I had two undergraduate degrees in a field different than what I had started in. Most people did not expect this, as I had taken a temporary part-time hiatus to go home after my funds ran out, which precipitated my shift in plans. My Mom was an employee at the University in a Biology laboratory so that was how I afforded to attend college. There was no old money or advice to get from other members of our families because no one else had ever gone through any of the school health or employment systems in America before our immediate family. I learned that it wasn't until changes in immigration policy in approximately 1965 that an influx wave of Asians arrived in the United States, but not too many before then. I had also heard stories from my parents' friends that in the late '60s and early '70s, people got so lonely when they first

arrived in the U.S. that they would call random phone numbers just to have the sound of a friendly human voice.

Rose Vernice: So, you got through college, and what was next?

Padma Sherni: As soon as I graduated from college, I wanted my own apartment. My parents said, "NO WAY, Jose." Okay, they didn't really say that last part, but they did say "NA." So, I wrote out a logical reason, in a three-page essay, that was actually very sound and rational (given references to my earlier course on logic) as to why I should be allowed to move out and get my own place (all the while cursing why I didn't study harder with flashcards in that logic math class.) I only partly won my debate.

My parents must have been preparing me for what certain types of love relationship arguing styles are like in response to my announcement that I wanted to move out into my own apartment. They said to me, at first seemingly reasonable and rational, "Okay, let's discuss." We gathered at the kitchen table, and within one minute, they would say, "We have decided this is not a good idea…(pause)…This was a good discussion." And then they would adjourn! I reflected humorously and protested somewhat sarcastically that this was obviously non-democratic oppression and a violation of my women's rights! I learned something more

about standing up for oneself and others during my second year of college.

So, with female friends who sympathized and empathized, I planned my escape. I got a job (this methodology seemed to be the formula that worked best for my life goals), and it broke my heart, but I self-reflected a lot and ultimately decided that I wasn't doing anything wrong. I left. I signed a lease, and I called to tell my parents that I had and that we could meet for dinner at home if they wanted to talk more. All chaos broke loose after that. I was smart enough at least to have friends that were boys too, at the time, if I needed protection either from bad guys or my parents at that point. Plus, I still had to find out who "dharu" was, apparently. Although I had met a lot of people, I still didn't know "dharu," but my friends educated me in the way that good friends would for families like ours who have no prior generation to ask for advice or depend on for support and therefore often act as a surrogate family but not literally. I was not all friendly with dharu at first, as I discovered this was actually just another word for alcohol and not a real person. Other than that, I cannot tell you how many times people have verified my last name this year and how exactly it is pronounced. Meter failed on the accent comprehension apparently, regarding my name as Padma Sherni. (My name, by the way, evolved out of the word for Lotus and then consequently my

temperament at times as I was described to be like a female tigress. Therefore, the name Padma Sherni is what everyone began to refer to me as, and I accepted my moniker.)

Rose Vernice: How did your parents react to your wanting to move out?

Padma Sherni: Well, for TEN YEARS, my parents would not let me forget that I had moved out on my own. Everyone was mad at me when I left. I did not even know what I was looking for other than I wanted everyone (my parents and all of society "brown town and friends" as well as "non-brown town and friends") to stop demanding of me and telling me what to do and to stop making me feel like I had to meet all their expectations for who they thought I should be. The year or two prior to this, I was realizing this, and I ran SO hard to find myself. I ended up right back where MY PARENTS had started (in India) and met a lot of cool people, where we discussed matters with a lot of important personnel about the difference between individualistic and collectivist thinking. This included the Prime Minister and Vice President of India at that time in 1999. I also learned that no matter how late you are running, even according to Indian Standard Time, you should never run on the grounds of important personnel because there are a lot of security people with arms around who are really not there to hug you. I continued with life and work and friends when I returned to the

USA and was happy to make new friends and continue progressing with life.

Padma Sherni: Then there was the horse trainer. I was single in my early twenties, and as usual my friends or colleagues would try their hand at matchmaking for me. My co-worker set me up on a blind date. She told me my date was tall, dark, and handsome, of Indian descent, possibly from the West, and therefore maybe from the West Indies, and most likely well off. I already gathered something was off with her understanding of geography, but I let it go. She didn't understand what part of India would make me "a Hindi" or not. "Padma Sherni, what type of Hindi are you?" (She had meant to say Hindu). So, she tried to motivate me to meet with this guy who I might have so much in common with being from the West (the U.S. being considered "the West."). I had my hesitations because I had never been on a blind date before, but I was feeling adventurous. I decided to be tough, though. I only agreed to meet this guy on my turf: the donut and coffee shop where I usually got my cappuccino mocha ice coffees.

First, I noticed he had a beard. I did NOT like facial hair, so I was disappointed. He had a baseball cap. I was not into baseball at that time. (Remember, I am a basketball girl). He was somewhat too opinionated because he already had a pre-set idea that we were going to have dinner together, whereas I had only agreed to coffee.

I had not yet honed my debate skills enough for lack of opportunity with prior decision-making experiences. I was somewhat concerned about being polite, but I really wanted coffee and donuts, plus the cashier behind the counter there was nice. I started talking to the cashier and learned that he was European but of Middle Eastern descent and he was happy to learn that I was of Indian descent because he loved Bollywood music videos.

The horse-trainer guy seemed so upset at the idea that I did not want to spend more time with him than just coffee that I would have been okay to have someone else present who was understanding. The cashier looked at me sympathetically. I was still learning about the horse trainer guy and decided I was, in fact, going to have dinner so I agreed to give him a chance and have dinner with him.

Then, of course, I proceeded to grill politely. I demanded to know where exactly he wanted to go. (I got better at this standard procedure with other people later.) He suggested a restaurant whose name I did not recognize, but I had an idea of the location. I at least knew the road and told him I would go in my own car. He was so frustrated with me.

We were still deciding as he got up and started to walk with me outside when I realized he was shorter than me. I was so frustrated with my friend who set up the date in the first place.

Side note: Why do many hetero women and men prefer to have the man be taller than the woman? Is that because of traditional gender roles or the expectation of the woman being able to lean on a man and have his support? Personally, I was still exploring the concept of equals.

Anyways, the horse trainer guy wanted to drive even though I had my own car, but I was more comfortable with him driving his own car and me driving mine. Plus, he had a pickup truck, and I just thought that was impractical for any future family, as I thought way ahead of myself.

Unfortunately, I ended up going with him to the restaurant in his pickup truck. I had never been in a pickup truck and figured I should at least know what that kind of vehicle was like. My only other concern was what music station he might select and whether or not we would clash with our preferences. We decided not to listen to the radio, and it was awkwardly silent for twelve minutes as we drove to our destination.

At the restaurant, as soon as he started to tell me what I should eat or not from the menu, I knew immediately the "relationship" was over. I learned more about him, though, while we waited for food about his life as a horse trainer (and yet his human interaction had no emotional sense, which I thought was weird; therefore, he probably was not a very good horse trainer because he did not understand how I was feeling, and I deduced he might not be very good with people or animals. I did not like this idea at all. He already had a preset idea of how his date was going to be, but he was not in the present moment.) I learned that although he was of Indian descent, he was actually from Dubai, and he was telling me about horse races. I think he was rich, but I did not care about his financial status. I told him I knew about dog tracks, but I did not think they were very compassionate. I was somewhat more curious about Dubai but had no immediate plans of going there at the time. I got through dinner, and he was driving me back to my car when he suggested that we go check out of his apartment, which was more than half an hour away. I realized with a change of environment I was still not going to like this horse trainer because he was not aware of my feelings. He tried to entice me with the idea that we could have something to drink there. Thank goodness I already knew about dharu from my friends.

Well, I was not thirsty, and I did not like the guy and was still trying to be polite. Also, I did not really drink much, so I was not

enticed. I was reprimanding myself for not driving my own car as I had wanted to and as I had planned. As we approached a traffic light, the horse trainer guy tried to lean toward me to make a move to kiss me, and both he and I were shocked that I was willing to open the car door to jump out of a moving vehicle to avoid this. I think that was when I yelled at him and gave him a lecture and demanded to go back to the donut and coffee shop immediately and enforced the fact that I had no interest in going to his apartment or anywhere else. I think I said thank you for dinner and closed the door to the horse trainer guy. The cashier at the shop smiled sympathetically as he looked at my face to get a read on whether all went well or not on my date. I shook my head, disappointed, and he shrugged, told me not to worry, and offered more coffee sympathetically. I thanked him, and then I was happy to be back in my own car, my own music, and heading back to my own home with a reminder to myself that in the future, I should avoid blind dates.

Rose Vernice: You chose to travel via Dubai more recently and mentioned that you loved the beautiful structures and the music also. You've traveled abroad at different times in different contexts…Was it tough to go back to Boston, or did you want to stay where you were?

Padma Sherni: There was a diversity hurricane that spun through many of our lives during many efforts of relationship starts and ends, and I continued to hear the stories of my family and friends and their loves and dreams, as well as losses and unexpected unrealized wishes. That was a tough and confusing time for a lot of people, especially with everyone moving around so much for work or school that impacted relationships too. Hearts be gettin' stolen and broken every other day like an indecisive revolving door. Who wouldn't understand drama? Percussion.

As everyone who has known me well in my life will tell you, I was still pining for my Boston crush, whether or not I was aware of this myself. I applied to only two graduate schools for further studies. I really wanted to learn more, and I really wanted a good match of an environment for a new experience to understand systems that make people feel better. I was accepted into both schools and decided upon the Boston area.

I had heard by then in my personal exploration of culture and faith that there is an Elephant God of wisdom and obstacle removal as one representation of the One Light many lamps. I was in awe when I stood in front of the student services building of one of the schools, facing an elephant representation, and I was so thankful even though the school was not affiliated in particular with an Elephant God. So, that was one reason for choosing that particular

school, or perhaps the school chose me, and I was hopeful of good luck to earn my way to some knowledge and wisdom.

Getting to Boston at the time was a metaphor for my life because that was where I felt I would thrive. The move back from Delaware to Massachusetts was during the summer before my graduate coursework had started. My Mom had asked my Dad to drive me to Boston for graduate school. So, he did. Literally, he dropped me off at my friend's place and then left and drove all the way back to Delaware. I love my Dad. He is awesome and a good advisor and offers loads of encouragement. However, the transportation role was usually my Mom's department, so the instructions were followed quite literally, much to both my Mom's and my amazement.

The travel to Massachusetts was actually quite inconvenient for me as someone else had heard we were going and also needed a ride because they had no other means of transport. So, I had to take less of my belongings in order to accommodate this stranger who was the friend of a friend of an "athiyo" or avatar somewhere. I had nothing more than a suitcase of clothes that filled half a trunk and then my desk parts that I still assembled with two pieces left over on the side. I didn't have room for anything else due to this inconvenience, and my parents always supported everyone else and helped me understand that it was important to help others.

When I got to Boston, I didn't have a car, so I walked and took the bus or the T (train/metro/subway), which took 1.5 hours each way, even though I wasn't that far from where I was trying to get to. I had never been on public transportation of any kind on my own, other than a school bus because I had only ever gone to public school far away from the main city. I didn't know where anything was on the map and was so overwhelmed with so many changes at once that I cried. My friend's response to this emotional outburst was frustrated exasperation and yelling at me. I would later remind her that she had the privilege of attending private school and always took the T to commute because she lived closer to the city and that although she was also of Indian descent, she didn't understand me or how I felt. At least some friends and I escaped to Cape Cod that weekend but then they abandoned me that first weekend for other priorities. This included my friend who lectured me because she is, in fact, like one of my many surrogate sisters who I can't really live without in spite of my complaints and protests because there are too many others who might understand me even less.

THEN, I had the worst allergic reaction that had ever erupted. (This was all within 1 week of returning to Boston after a number of years.). I called another friend, this time, the Boston crush from my daydream, and said something to the effect of cueing the

melody of pop culture synthesizers and love lyrics that I could not in that moment recall the actual words of.

Actually, no, that's just my stream of consciousness running away without me. Actually, what I stated was more along the lines of "Hi. I'm in Boston. I didn't have time to tell you yet, but I moved back, and I just started school. I'm having a severe allergic reaction, and I don't know where anything or anyone is. Where are you? Please come get me. Knowing that, hopefully, he would show up. My friend asked, surprised, "You're in Boston? You moved back?

I'm in the middle of class. Wait, this sounds… Serious. Okay. I'll be there." He arrived, and my heart felt so much better, plus he still looked really handsome, and then the first thing he said to me after not having seen me in years: "Wow. You look terrible." "Thanks a lot, I'm in the midst of an allergic reaction, remember?" He smiled. He sang to me while we waited for my medicine in the pharmacy parking lot. Even though I knew my allergic reaction would heal in a day or so, I felt a lot better with him nearby. I hope we get to spend more time together in the future.

Later I would go for walks in the neighborhood with another friend and had one foot in Delaware still and another in Boston. In the summer, my friend looked at my toes that I had happily painted something sweet and brick red when she announced, "That is a fire

me (euphemism) red, Padma Sherni." I was so offended and protested. "Well, don't be offended. That's what that is," she said matter-of-factly about MY toes. I was definitely upset. My other friend in Delaware made me feel better. He laughed and joked with me, "If you guys keep up with this, you'll eventually re-invent the nail polish color wheel charts!" Truer words had not been previously spoken.

Rose Vernice: Where else have you been? Did you tell anyone about your travels?

Padma Sherni: After two years of coursework, I went to see the koala bears in person in Australia for real to escape.

The cable car had awesome people traveling over Taronga Zoo. They shouted out, "Hey, look at all the humans!" My grandfather, GKM, who lived in India, and I would write letters back and forth and send postcards to share the latest reflections of life. He loved that I had chosen to learn by exploring for myself in person other places to help my mind grow. He was a scientist, but every morning, he would garden flowers and vegetables, and when I would go to India, he would wake me up super early in the morning to go for a walk together and talk about life. When he had lost most of his hearing, he still used his hearing aid because he wanted to hear all my love stories to make sure I was living my life

freely (unlike what my parents seemed to understand at the time). I remember having to shout out at the top of my lungs the details in the middle of the park where we had stopped to rest because he didn't hear me the first time. "I HAVE A BOYFRIEND!" Who knows what that looked like to anyone who didn't know me or that this older gentleman was my beloved grandfather. I asked my Dadu ("grandfather") not to tell my parents yet. He agreed. The next day, he reported back to me, "But your mother seems to know and like this person." Then, I exclaimed, "Dadu! Did you tell someone something you were not supposed to?!" No. He had asked my mother similar questions and figured it out for himself. Phew. He was really smart. My Dida ("grandmother") Latika was even smarter, though. She had been hoping for quite some time that I would eventually learn how to talk with my Boston crush and to learn how to "fish and cook": "Bhetki macher bhaja" and "Eeleesh mach until then." Bhetki mach is a type of fish that has only a few bones, whereas Eeleesh mach is a type of fish that has a lot of bones and is difficult to eat. The preparation is usually West Bengali, Indian style, either fried or in light watery curry sauce: "jhol." These dil pickle dilemmas were usually resolved with good advice, with heart, and a good sense of multicultural humor.

Rose Vernice: So, when did just being who you are started to make sense?

Padma Sherni: I tried to start to make sense of the world at some point before or after basketball camp through my college and graduate school years and beyond in an ongoing effort. I learned to love both my own diverse cultural background and other diverse cultures because, in many ways, we are more similar than not. People are so interesting and glamorous in their own way, just like anthropologists. I am pretty sure there was a grand misunderstanding somewhere that fed into what I would just like to say was the start of many dating disasters that ran simultaneously and parallel to many matchmaking disasters that coincided with many weddings of friends.

Those who were of West Bengal, Indian descent, or Desi (from "desh" from "the land" of India) of any kind will tell you these relationship drama details with embellishment and em-PHA-sis, in a sweet way and confident, opinionated manner of speaking. Then the drama that has unfolded is retold through historical and modern interpretations at those wedding events or even the annual cultural conference of the eastern peoples in the western hemisphere. At weddings and cultural events, and the dramatic interpretations of these incidents, no typical drama network has anything they could compete with in comparison to our colloquial wannabe Bollywood style of dramatic descriptions of people and the world around us. You must concede this. At weddings, people will steal shoes, "athiyo" and extended family will bribe, others will

barricade, and your own friends and family will not let you sleep on your own wedding night! This is customary for people, just customary. Some family will, as is tradition in one side of my family (just let any future suitors be forewarned), find a good hiding place and plot and wait for hours in the room of the bride and groom to jump out at them at some rather inopportune or very hopefully fortuitous moment later that night and tell everyone what they did or never really did see. Ha ha! The last time this happened, NO ONE WOULD TELL ME because I always empathize with anyone who does not have informed consent or the privacy policy. Of course, my efforts would spoil the plans of good-humored mischief, and yes, I usually do try to foil those plans with equal enthusiasm and send a warning. "Get a phone number to evacuate! Call the family support switchboard! Tell them to change rooms! GO, GO, GO, NOW!" There is no point. They never gave me the correct information to work with, to begin with. This may be partly why I am still single or am hoping for more time with my Boston crush. I am not disclosing my fiancé's hopes or engagement status plans yet.

As far as anyone else is concerned, I subconsciously foil my own other dates because I value my dreams and my crushes. I'm hoping someone with the collective support of well-wishers, something good happens. I learned what a hook shot was in 8th

grade basketball camp, but I think it is possible that someone else might hopefully have better technique.

Rose Vernice: And 22 years later in 2017, what is life like?

I just celebrated my fortieth birthday in the Spring of 2017. I was born in 1977 in Massachusetts. What updates can I share with you? For starters, I've learned not to foil my own dates anymore. This came after the realization that my Boston crush had, in fact, just settled into a friendship with me and a date with someone else. Unfortunately, I went into rebound mode (I'm still a basketball girl, remember?). I then learned the tough lesson of no response from a would-be good catch of a guy who rightly was not interested in my desperate email with too many run-on sentences.

Now for the task of a self-defined makeover. I spent the last year being barraged by other people's opinions about what to do with my life as I got closer to completing a Ph.D. Some people gave me unsolicited advice about what to do with my medium-length hair multiple times a day: "Put it in a bun," "Leave it down," "Get highlights," "Shorten it," and while at the salon: "Shorter! Shorter!" until they gave up as I stubbornly kept it the same style: long layers with angles around the face.

I thoroughly enjoyed my winter hibernation also. I indulged in whatever I wanted to eat and whenever I wanted to sleep and

only occasionally kept up with gym workouts because I just needed to rest after the prior season's workaholic lifestyle. I had signed up for two graduate courses, an internship, and a part time evening receptionist job while working on my dissertation proposal.

Also, during the winter, I restarted guitar lessons for 5 weeks while I waited anxiously for university review and approval of my dissertation proposal. Once that passed, I got busy with my research project almost immediately.

While my family traveled for a visit to India, I stayed home, and the kitchen became my second office space for piles and piles of survey paperwork, organizing outreach to approximately 800 people in order to get a hopeful 20% response rate. I'll let you know what happens with the research later.

I talked with a guy for a few weeks, that I met online during the winter also. And you guessed it: foiled plans for meeting in the spring. He randomly texted me by mistake when he got a new phone number. After a few civil and friendly explanations, we said our goodbyes again. This happened a second time with a different guy in the spring, and now my summer is totally free.

It's just as well. I have to finish my Ph.D. and, as soon as I do, move out of my parents' house. I know, I know, that's a deal

breaker for most people to date someone still in graduate school and, especially while living at home, but it was a welcome time to study while avoiding a serious relationship.

The second major change is that with a little bit of salary, I've learned to enjoy shopping and a nail polish collection. This began when I missed my flight shopping at an airport cart in Florida. With nothing else to do for fourteen more hours, I spent money at a different cart on a $10 t-shirt and $17 nail polish and promptly went to a hotel, which was an additional expense I hadn't planned for.

Anyway, with all of these lessons learned, I'm approaching summer with a steadfast goal to keep my priorities on track: Get in shape, make progress on the Ph.D., get a full-time job, and move out. I've been applying for jobs in both local places and further, in cities like Philadelphia and New York. I hope something works out soon.

In the meantime, I have started a book club, and when people actually sign up, I have the opportunity to try different restaurants and cafes while meeting new people who want to discuss a good read over a meal.

I still have wavy black hair and brown eyes. After the Florida mishap and the past several years, I now aspire to add balance to an economical fashion sense. With a better budget from my job,

given my educational expenses and business ventures. I've learned to be practical even though, in actuality, I have expensive taste. After experience working for different research organizations, I have started my own company so I can plan to be more available to a future growing family and various interdependent relationships. Along the way, I often seek out mentorship from others to continue life learning and sometimes give advice to others who request my counsel as well.

When I write more again, stories of life experiences and relationships may be included in future vignettes of people to describe the accomplishments of people of multicultural backgrounds as well as the obstacles they had to overcome in order to get to where they are today. I am still trying to understand the wide range of single life, dating, and marriage plans that people have, children, and career endeavors. Some people are still exploring, while others have had love marriages, semi-arranged marriages, and arranged marriages...

So, although in my younger years, I prioritized finding the right relationship, I've learned that I needed to respect my own set of activities and priorities first, and gradually the right relationship then becomes part of my life as well. That's where I stand today. My Boston crush is still one of my really good friends that I have shared a lot of fun experiences with. This is a story itself because

we helped each other find other love interests unexpectedly...The lesson learned however, with some maturity is that sometimes the timing isn't ever right and we can just fill our lives with people we can grow with, and eventually the right relationships emerge!

For now, however, I should go. My phone is ringing with the indication of a new text message, and I am looking forward to talking with a new guy…However, I find that I am happiest simply being myself and living my life freely. Hope all of you are well and finding what makes you happy with respect to others as well. I also hope you continue to build towards meeting your dreams and aspirations. I am.

Rose Vernice: Thank you so much!

The phone rings again. Padma Sherni answers the phone.

Part Two

Festival Friendships and

Other Sweet Treats

A note:

Raja Tharasa and his friends are a fun, talented, and educated group of people. These fictional vignettes are a humorous look at some of their life events getting to know each other. This story takes place 10 years prior to a coffee shop meeting with Padma Sherni and Harington Cooper. Padma Sherni has not yet taken space from friends.

Nancy: (*On the phone with Padma Sherni).* Are you going to be here on time, Chom Chom, my flat kind of Roshogolla sweet?

Padma Sherni: I can't even tell when you're being sarcastic or just plain yourself.

Nancy: Ha! Guess who's over? You would be drooling, if you knew! Also, everyone is going to be mad at you if you don't come over. I think we're supposed to plan a surprise, but I'm just telling you, please be here on time and I'll just order tofu nuggets, so you don't have to outdo yourself or anything.

Padma Sherni: May I say something? (from the car, outside of the meeting venue)

Nancy: Well, just tell me when you get here, Bye. *And hangs up.*

Padma Sherni: *Walks over to the house and greets everyone.*

Nancy: *Nods to Padma Sherni.* Then says, "So, our "Best Star," Raja Tharasa, how was your performance at the theater last weekend? And your band performances?"

Raja Tharasa: Sold out, fortunately. We did a version of "Guy likes Girl and Girl Likes Guy, in an extended family context and where instead of both dying at the end they date privately without family and friend intrusion and live happily ever after. The costumes and set design were done really well. A talent recruiter was in the audience and offered a contract for work if I was willing to move from Boston to New York. They want me to play the role of Shriyadita C. London.

Padma Sherni: That's fantastic. I want to visit you backstage at least once to be done up by the makeup artists for fun. Are you taking the talent recruiter up on the offer?

Raja Tharasa: I am. And I hope you'll visit me (*takes Padma Sherni's hand and recites or sings a few lines from a song from the play…*)

Padma Sherni is surprised, her jaw drops, and then starts laughing out loud.

Norendar: I don't appreciate you holding my girlfriend's hand.

Nancy and Sundar (laughing nervously).

Padma Sherni: *laughing again.*

Raja Tharasa: Take it easy, man.

Norendar: You're always singing to people, and now you're holding her hand. That's enough.

Padma Sherni: *laughs.* I've known him almost my whole life, don't worry.

Raja Tharasa: No problem.

Nancy: Excuse me, I think we should just transition to dessert. Sundar, will you please help me get the cake?

Sundar: Sure. (*Starts laughing).*

Raja Tharasa: I'll also help.

Raja Tharasa also excuses himself with Nancy and Sundar to get the cake.

Norendar to Padma Sherni: Why did you have to hold his hand?

Padma Sherni: okay okay, I understand. He's my friend, and we're just having fun.

Raja Tharasa turns to Sundar: What's with that guy? Is she even happy with him?

Sundar: (*laughing*) Don't worry. He's a science guy, very serious. Not sure how long this one will last.

1 year later.

Padma Sherni is single again. She wears a nice dress and is looking forward to meeting friends in Boston. They play carom at an apartment before heading out to regular billiards and dancing at a club in the theatre district with drinks to celebrate her 30th birthday. They order chocolate and vanilla cupcakes with frosting.

5 years later.

She is spending some time thinking while walking alongside a park bench. Her job has run out of funding, and she is leaving Massachusetts to work and study more in Delaware after dating sporadically and not finding the right guy where she is. In 2012, she is 35 years old and attended a lovely wedding of her Chinese American friend Lisette to her Greek American boyfriend, George. She had just gotten clear bracket braces before the event and could barely smile yet was happy for her friend. She also had 4 graduate courses she was trying to complete homework for and didn't quite have time to dress up the way she wanted to, however at the end of the weekend, homework was completed, and the events celebrated, and all was just as well.

In 2013, Padma Sherni is 36 years old and has attended many more events with friends. She is beginning to wonder if she'll ever meet the right guy and upon trying online dating, discovers that someone has already placed a profile for her. Her friends suggest going out to a comedy night, and Padma Sherni agrees… her friend Dawn McCallister and Dawn's husband suggest going to one at a university event in Delaware when she learns of a comedian visiting town the following weekend.

During the week, Dawn McCallister and Padma Sherni meet at a local Delaware park to go for a walk. Dawn is already waiting when Padma Sherni arrives.

People playing basketball…

Padma Sherni talking with her friend: Who are they?

Dawn McCallister: Just local guys from the office building there. They have been playing weekly for the past month, and I noticed them and thought the eye candy was worth inviting you over to the park for. *(Smiles)*

Padma Sherni: Thank you. (*Smiles)*

Dawn McCallister: So, I heard that one of them is a detective, and maybe given your unknown ad poster situation, maybe you could talk to him…?

Padma Sherni: That's a great idea… I'll write to him.

Dawn McCallister: Just go introduce yourself when they take a break! He's right there.

Padma Sherni: Okay… (*hesitating*…)

Dawn McCallister: I'll go with you!

Padma Sherni: Okay…

Dawn McCallister: Excuse me! My friend here saw you and wanted to be introduced. If you have a few minutes?

Detective Vikram: *(Smiles)* Sure…

Dawn McCallister: This is my friend Padma Sherni. Someone has posted an ad in the paper for marriage, and she has started to receive several emails from suitors.

Detective Vikram: So, what's the problem?

Padma Sherni: I don't know who posted the ad!

Detective Vikram: Let me read the ad…. Slender 40-something female… *(stops)* You're not slender.

Padma Sherni: *(jaw drops open)* Well, you're observant.

Dawn McCallister: *to Padma Sherni,* Let's go.

Detective Vikram: Sorry, I meant to say you're more built. *(Smiles)*

Padma Sherni: What does that mean?

Detective Vikram: Sorry, you're okay. *(Smiles)*

Detective Vikram: *(continues reading…)* Academic. Pleasant personality. Requires a professional male to be her husband. Preferably Tall and Serious Going Personality.

Padma Sherni: Well?

Detective Vikram: *(laughs)* How many suitors do you have?

Padma Sherni: You can't be serious.

Detective Vikram: Okay, are you single?

Padma Sherni: Sort of. I'm in between relationships.

Detective Vikram: (*laughs)*

Padma Sherni: I have a brilliant idea! YOU should interview the suitors.

Detective Vikram: *(laughs)* Are you seriously contemplating paying me to do this?

Padma Sherni: Yes.

Detective Vikram: *(Sends a text message)* Okay, I'll need an assistant. I think you should help me interview them also. *(Smiles)*

Padma Sherni: Yes! I'll pretend I'm the sister or friend of the female they would like to meet!

Detective Vikram: *(laughs)* Why don't you just date them or request the agency to take the ad down and post a real ad for yourself. Wait - I just got a text message from the ad agency – the request is legitimate and came from your parents. *(Laughs)*

Padma Sherni: No way…

Detective Vikram: Yes way…

Padma Sherni: Well then, I suppose I should have guessed as much. I'm wary about dating total strangers, though.

Detective Vikram: It's the new wave of online dating and newspaper ads. Oh, wait. Another text message. *(Laughs)* Your parents just invited me over for dinner. Apparently, they knew someone's uncle who has a son interning at the newspaper agency who found out from his friend's sister that an inquiry was made about the origin of the ad posting, and your parents want to make sure there's no trouble. *(Laughs)*

Padma Sherni: *Very surprised.* Typical Indian American family. Ummm… I have a brilliant idea! I'll bring you over to my new boyfriend and tell them I called the ad agency to call off the detective. And YOU can convince them not to post any ads for me anymore. Problem solved.

Dawn McCallister: *(laughing)* Hooray.

During the week, Padma Sherni explores more information about the comedy show they have planned to go to. She thinks the comedian looks just like Detective Vikram but thinks it's too much of a coincidence. She tells Dawn McCallister.

Dawn McCallister: *laughs.* Well, we're going to the comedy show regardless of whether or not the Detective shows up at your house for dinner. Then you can find out for sure who the guy is.

The weekend arrives, and although Padma Sherni is really looking forward to the event, she is not feeling well, has a ton of unfinished work, and has to cancel going to the show… She begs to reschedule for the winter holiday show instead. Her parents will conveniently be away, and her work will be complete, and she will have more time to sort through this mystery.

Dawn McCallister: Okay, but we're making these plans to go eventually…

Then, Raja Tharasa calls Padma Sherni one day from New York and has a conversation about how busy life has gotten. They reminisce about being away from the Boston area and decide to get some of their friends together in New York and attend a gallery art show and music performance.

Friends (Nancy and Sundar, Bhim and sister Mishty) from Boston get in the car and start singing along to Bollywood music, including Bengali Indian traditional folk music, to visit Raja Tharasa in New York and then also ask Padma Sherni to visit New York from Delaware.

The friends go to a local gallery where some items are on display…before a music show starts…

Raja Tharasa: Have you seen the pottery exhibit?

Padma Sherni: yes! I submitted a piece there.

Raja Tharasa: Really? Which one? Since when did you do pottery?

They walk over to the pottery exhibit…

Padma Sherni: This one.

Raja Tharasa: wow. What is that?

Padma Sherni: It's pottery.

Raja Tharasa: No, really.

Padma Sherni: Okay, is it that obvious? I couldn't decide between an ashtray and a vase, so it's a combination.

Raja Tharasa: That is… (laughs) fantastic. Sees Songeeta... Wow, who is that?

Padma Sherni: I think that's the singer, Songeeta. *(a little bit disappointed that Raja Tharasa has noticed Songeeta)*

An announcement is made that the singer will start performing. The music starts. Raja Tharasa wants to get to know the singer. Others in the audience include Jeff and Mishty…

Jeffrey: Hi, I'm Jeff. Are you, by any chance, going to the event at the museum event next weekend?

Mishty: Hi, I'm Mishty…I'm actually trying to get out of class to go to a multicultural fusion dance show, which includes hip hop and bhangra, in New York, but I'm not even sure if I'm allowed to go, even though I'm over 21 and all.

Jeff: Oh…disappointed and confused. Why wouldn't you be allowed to go?

Mishty: My older sister practically had to be engaged in order to get to last year's event because it was out of state. The bus and train are cheap. I'm just using the excuse that I'm staying at my cousin's

place and have to take a standardized test the next morning. Not trying to elope to get married or something, just trying to have some fun.

Jeff: Well, I have a car, and I'm allowed to go. *Smiles…*

Mishty: That's because *you're* a guy.

Jeff: We should go. Who are your cousins? Maybe I know them?

Mishty: No offense, but why on earth would you know my cousins?

Jeff: Even though I'm Caucasian, I have some Indian family members amongst my European American family, actually, for your information. If your parents are hesitant about letting you go, what are they concerned about?

Mishty: Too much alcohol at parties and getting distracted from school with boys.

Jeff: Laughs. I think that's typical for most parents.

Mishty: I don't even drink. I want to be a D.J. or a media journalist when I "grow up," and that is not as routine as a science job like they have, which they would say is more "reliable." But although I'm Asian, I'm not good at math.

Jeff: That's because you don't go to class, from what you told me earlier.

Mishty: laughs. Okay, just trying to defy stereotypes. Recently, I was the only Indian in the math class, and the teaching assistant was a really smart 16-year-old prodigy from India. He kept choosing me to answer the questions because he assumed I would know the answers, being Indian American and all. At least, that is what I think happened.

Jeff: Maybe he liked you.

Mishty: That's a totally inappropriate assumption! However, I think he was trying to encourage participation.

Jeff: Okay, maybe it's what you said. *Smiles.*

Mishty: Well…let me know if you want to go.

Jeff: I have cousins also there that might want to go, so maybe I'll meet up with you there.

Mishty: Sounds like a plan. Smiles. Let me ask some friends. That sounds fun and really nice. I'm from the Boston area, by the way.

Jeff: Really, what a coincidence, so am I!

The singer performs some songs… Raja Tharasa talks to the singer, Songeeta, after the show.

Raja Tharasa: Hi, great show.

Songeeta: Thank you!

Raja Tharasa: I'd love to collaborate with you on some music. I have a band also.

Songeeta: Interesting. Let's exchange contact info then.

They exchange contact information and Raja Tharasa is happy. Valerie Valeeni, a friend of Raja Tharasa, is also at the show; she invites him to her cooking class the next day.

Valerie Valeeni: Hi, I thought that was you. Macking on the singer, I see.

Raja Tharasa: laughs, I just thought I'd try to collaborate on some music with her if possible.

Valerie Valeeni: sure, sure, whatever – hope it all works out. I am running a cooking class tomorrow- maybe you should stop by and invite her also. And I have some paperwork from one of our projects to give to you also.

Raja Tharasa: okay I'll try...

Later on, Raja Tharasa calls Songeeta.

Raja Tharasa: It was great to meet you and attend your show. I wanted to know if you'd like to spend the afternoon together. My friend asked me to stop by her cooking class to pick up something, but then we can get coffee/tea and perhaps check out a music studio together if you're interested?

Songeeta: Sounds good.

Padma Sherni has been talking with Jeff and Mishty, and friends say goodbye temporarily and Padma Sherni explains she has to head back to Delaware.

In the kitchen the next day...

Valerie Valeeni: *(as the instructor).* We are making an individual tandoori chicken pizza. The instructions are on your tables, and I will guide you throughout the process if you need help. Course evaluations will be passed out at the end, so please don't leave right away.

Valerie Valeeni: *Walking over to Raja Tharasa.* So, I'm trying to cook more instead of ordering from the diner all the time. I have to maintain my figure, but you all can motivate yourselves however you want for the love of good, nutritious food.

Raja Tharasa: So, what have you been up to since I last saw you?

Valerie Valeeni: more of the usual fashion shows, events, and Sunday coffee with friends at the diner. I should introduce you to some people…Cooking is just a hobby. Okay, I need to get back to the class.

Raja Tharasa: Sure thing

Valerie Valeeni: I also happen to have talked with Songeeta, the singer. I think you two should meet again and get to know each other.

Raja Tharasa: Smiles. Interesting. Laughs. Okay, I'm interested. And in fact, I brought her with me. She's over there by the ad board.

Valerie Valeeni: do you want to join me for the class?

Raja Tharasa: we'll stay for a while…but go ahead with your class, and if we leave early, I'll catch up with you later…

Valerie Valeeni: okay…

Valerie Valeeni, Instructor: *dramatically and humorously tossing ingredients around*…after marinating the chicken in yogurt and tandoori spices, cook that on the stove for 30 minutes. Then sprinkle some cornmeal on the pizza stone or flat pan, on a premade naan bread or flatbread, use some garden vegetable pasta sauce on the

dough, and sprinkle mozzarella cheese or any shredded cheese blend you like. Add the chicken pieces. Sautee some zucchini and squash on the side in some butter, salt, and pepper.

Sejal and her friend are attending the class.

Sejal: (mumbles to herself) You'd think she was an expert or something. Tossing ingredients and trying to tell other attendees how to make their pizza (humorously).

Sejal then tries to be like the instructor when she is talking with Sarbajit and accidentally tosses her food onto others' plates and then fixes the situation humorously when others have gone to get more ingredients at the main counter.

Sheel and Somandra are also attending the class. Sheel is trying to avoid Detective Vikram who he saw at the park. Sheel wants to act in a stage performance with Raja Tharasa and his band who are helping with a soap opera pilot but got in trouble for hounding him too many times. He is so happy to see Raja Tharasa at the cooking class but maintains his distance.

Songeeta: So, how do you know Valerie?

Raja Tharasa: Valerie Valeeni works as an international actress on projects including me.

Songeeta: I thought she looked familiar. Anyway, let's go to the studio and see what music we can come up with…

Padma Sherni goes to get manicures and henna and gets advice from Shukru. She meets with friends there.

Pinky Patel is applying henna to a customer's hands…

Pinky Patel: Check out the Diwali celebration when you get a chance.

Padma Sherni: Sounds good...

Padma Sherni: I feel like I need music and fun events in my life again. I'm busy studying, but there are guys I want to talk with!

Pinky Patel: You've been spending a lot of time in grad school, although I heard what happened with the online dating ad posting – that's pretty funny…

Shukru: *(laughs and asks Padma Sherni)* How was your visit to New York?

Padma Sherni: Good. I was talking with a guitarist, Bhanu, and I think a singer named Songeeta is interested in Raja Tharasa. However, Raja Tharasa is busy with work and travels sometimes as an international diplomat. When he is back in the USA, he is busy as an international actor who also works on projects in New York

and of course, elsewhere. I am happy for him, but I miss spending time with him sometimes for some reason. I wonder what is going to happen with him and Songeeta.

Projapatty: Padma Sherni, you seem interested in different guys. Maybe you need to fill your time with the things that you like to do more often, especially outside of relationship matters, because you never know how things are going to turn out.

Padma Sherni: I'm not too worried. I'm just in transition and am looking for jobs so my priority has been about that. Raja Tharasa is someone I care about with a lot of affection. I'm genuinely happy for him when things are going well for him. I just want to spend some time in a different environment or with him sometimes.

Pinky Patel: I think you're just tired of studying all the time after having gone to a few fun events. Get your work done, then have fun and I agree, don't worry.

Shukru: What do you think about that guy Brendon ? He's a businessman in New York that sometimes does some comedy presentations. I think he's dating a few people.

Pinky Patel: I know him! Fun person to spend time with.

Padma Sherni: He sounds interesting.

Projapatty: An art or comedy show sounds like something fun to attend. Shukru, what do you think? What have you been up to lately?

Shukru: I started guitar lessons.

Padma Sherni: That's so great! I can only play four chords. Will you play something?

Shukru: Okay, you two can sing. (guitar playing…and singing)

A phone call came from Sabriya.

Sabriya: Hi, Padma Sherni, where are you?

Padma Sherni: Hi Sabriya. I'm spending time with Shukru and Pujoli…

Sabriya: I'm with Deepthi, headed to a yoga class. We're down the street and are stopping by before then…I'm exhausted from my work week as a doctor at the new location, so I'm trying to get rejuvenated with some good energy. That's Deepthi's suggestion because she has been taking some ayuvedic medicine classes also.

Padma Sherni: Interesting! Okay, sounds good, see you soon. Sabriya and Deepthi are visiting.

Projapatty and Shukru: *both get happy after hearing the news*. Great!

Guitar and singing continue when Sabriya arrives.

Sabriya: Hi, everyone; so, we're back from organizing a mobile medical van visit to older adult apartment housing units for health screenings and community-based support for chronic health issues.

Deepthi: We had speakers and partnered with local organizations. We got sponsors, and the event turned out really well.

Projapatty: That's a great idea!

Sabriya: What are you all up to?

Shukru: The usual, talking about work, guys, etc. Sabriya: Well, I think we shouldn't worry too much. We all work so hard. Let's just enjoy the music.

Pujoli: I agree. Let's just have some music now.

Sings another song.

The Diwali event announcement is read by Deepthi at the store.

Deepthi: This looks interesting. Does anyone want to go?

The group, (Pinky Patel, Shukru, Padma Sherni, Projapatty, and Sabriya): Agreed. Sounds fun. I'll attend. Great! Cool.

At the Diwali, festival of lights, celebration dance event the next weekend the multicultural fusion dances are celebrated. Traditional Indian Folk dance is mixed with modern Indian dances. Several people are in attendance. Raja Tharasa is telling his guy friends DJ Ajay and Puneet that he heard some people are interested in Padma Sherni while he was spending time with Songeeta.

Guitarist Bhanu: So, I play on this basketball team weekly, and I heard she's been talking with a detective to figure out who posted a marital ad for her. It turned out to be a friend or family member.

DJ Ajay: Mystery resolved. Hooray.

Puneet: That's hilarious and typical for Indian or Indian American women and men to go through…

After Raja Tharasa leaves... Gossiping continues...

DJ Ajay: Speaking of Raja Tharasa, he has been away from friends and family for a while due to a hectic work schedule. He met another actress colleague during his travels and that got him thinking about where he wants to live and work in the next year for a few years. They filmed a movie in which they look like they are married. Reminds me of when he and Padma Sherni had a photo taken for her high school dance event. *Laughing.*

Puneet: I agree his travel schedule has been busy. I hope he stays around but I understand he may have other priorities also. Work-wise I told him a girl named Sejal has also been in town after she lived in a few places and wants to know if she can work on the soap opera pilot which includes musical components and has auditioned. I have said: "not at this time." However, now we are aware she is in town if needed. She is busy working on an a cappella medley anyways for a Diwali program with her friend Dil Hoshan.

DJ Ajay: Oh, okay. Meanwhile, Padma Sherni's graduate studies progressed to a research proposal for her PhD, so she has spent more time in Delaware than in New York or Boston lately. Raja Tharasa has been planning a proposal for someone because he is starting to get ready to settle down. The proposal is to be a song presentation…He's still trying to figure out who to live with, also. He was practicing a proposal scene for an art project with Songeeta when an engagement ring got stuck temporarily on her. Now they are living together.

Puneet: Laughs. Oh no! What now?

DJ Ajay: Maybe it is for the movie that they were filming where they looked married. After that mishap, Songeeta and Raja Tharasa started to live together, date, and even sometimes work together, which is fine because Padma Sherni, who seemed interested, is primarily just a good friend. They are both okay with this decision

for now, given her graduate school priorities and his schedule. She still visits him sometimes when possible but is waiting to get to know Songeeta better. Raja Tharasa and his Band and art projects are quite popular, and so are Songeeta's projects. They are amicable with Padma Sherni, who is busy with life, and I heard she is working on her own art projects like a Diwali show function that has a theme based on the soap opera pilot or a mini drama series called "Bijoux Chandon." She and her friends with her characters from the Diwali show at the university, are trying out for the pilot production by making a really good presentation.

Puneet: Sounds good! Although he is friendly to Padma Sherni, Raja Tharasa has a romantic interest in Songeeta. He is already being recruited to play Shriyadita C. London because the original recruitment is attending to medical care for both himself and his family. Padma Sherni and friends attended a comedy show and discovered a few other people wanted to Brendon to attend the show. Dawn McCallister has sent some friends to check out the outdoor stage music festival and Diwali program. Brendon, the comedian, is, in fact, Detective Vikram. Some of the people participating in the show invited the dress designer to be a reviewer at the tea shop for a while. Other people planning to attend the outdoor stage performance might meet up at the café first also before rehearsal.

<u>Setting:</u> walkway or aisle outside the tea shop

Boishak: Hi Raina, good to see you here at the café before we head over to the outdoor stage to see what is happening there.

Raina: Hi Boishak, good to see you also.

Boishak: I bought you your favorite.

Raina: And what would that be?

Boishak: Sweet, Gajor halwa, obviously.

Raina: Thank you. And Samosas?

Boishak: Samosas too. Can we talk about music and singing practice for the band tryouts? I need someone to replace me for some songs because my photography hobby is starting to get busy. I have to take pictures for the fashion show while simultaneously my band is supposed to be playing. Can you help me out?

Raina: Sure, sounds fun. I don't have much more than amateur singing experience, but I'll try if you can coach me.

Boishak: I have time to coach you, but I have to develop my photos this afternoon at my studio. Why don't you stop by?

Raina: Okay, but I have to write an algorithm for social justice in the world, so I wasn't planning to be free for these hobbies until Friday. Maybe I can make an exception to be there this afternoon.

Boishak: That's fine. I have a photography session until 3pm, and then I want to bring my portfolio to the outdoor festival rehearsal to see if they will feature some of the photos to sell at the show.

Raina: Sure, then I can complete my research before this afternoon and meet you at the studio.

Setting: At the tea shop.

Surya: Excuse me, may I have a chocolate chip walnut cookie.

Server 2 (Dharoon): Hi, I'm Dharoon. Aren't you Surya, requested to be the restaurant and art reviewer?

Surya: Yes, I am. How are you?

Server 2 (Dharoon): (nervous now and excited) Would you like to try a coconut raspberry cream macaroon? Or a Butterscotch oatmeal cookie along with the chocolate chip walnut cookie?

Surya: That sounds very interesting. Yes.

Surya: May I also have one banana walnut bread and red velvet cupcake, please.

Server 2 (Dharoon): *(surprised).* Sure, and anything to drink?

Surya: Yes, please, one cup of masala chai and one cup of Earl Grey.

Surya: (*starts jotting down some notes describes the order out loud)*

Chocolate Chip Cookie: Chocolatey Decadence with unexpected panache with a dash and a verve of some delicate kind of sweet nothing other than the best of the world sweet and saltiness that keep competing for balance in my mouth.

Coconut Raspberry Cream Macaroon: Delicious. Makes me want to swim in jam and coconut flakes, on a cruise ship.

Butterscotch Oatmeal Cookie: Makes me want to hopscotch to funky town with candy corn.

Banana Walnut Bread: Typical.

Red Velvet Cupcake: Super duper

Server 2 (Dharoon) to Server 1 (Shondheybala): We have a restaurant or café critique occurring. This is exciting. Maybe we'll get an article in the paper.

Another customer, Chandra, walks in with a sketchpad, a camera, and a fashion magazine.

Surya: (reading a newspaper or magazine)

Server 1 (Shondheybala): Hi, I'm Shondheybala, what can I get for you?

Chandra: (to the server at the table as she takes out her sketchbook) Hi Shondheybala, may I have one order of Darjeeling tea, please, and what CD are you playing today?

Surya: (looks up)

Server 1 (Shondheybala): Yes, one tea coming right up, for? What name can I put on the order?

Chandra: Chandra, thank you.

Server 1 (Shondheybala): the CD is a recording from my band, Green Sugar. Title track "Sailboats". The band includes my friends Songeeta and Boishak and many other artists.

Server 1 (Shondheybala): We started writing new music just last week for that track.

Chandra: I like percussion and wind chimes.

Server 1 (Shondheybala): Thank you. What are you working on?

Chandra: New designs for a fashion show! We'll be here tomorrow night. After that, a music band will perform while a few people walk the aisle in fashionable outfits. There will also be a dance scene with folk outfits for *garba or dandiya-raas* if there is space. I'm thinking of asking Pinky Patel and some of her friends to do those dances beginning with a classical Bharatnatyam performance also.

Server 1 (Shondheybala): Cool. I heard that we were singing for the fashion show and that the actress Valerie Valeeni and others, including some guys Puneet and Ajay are going to be in the show.

Chandra: Yes! I'm looking forward to the collaboration. I wanted to stop by this venue and check it out and enjoy the café goods. Thanks for the tea, and I will catch up with you more later. *Chandra goes to a table with her tea and starts sketching.*

Server 1 (Shondheybala): Yes, of course. I will play the music and you can let me know if you request anything. Talk to you later!

Background music: ***"Sailboats" by the band Green Sugar***

Blue waves ebb and flow. Not sure when I'll get to go

Be with a true love, you know. That is the way of chasing sails

Maybe speed boats miss the romance tales.

Distant shores, know no more about what was better than before.

Perhaps without much more thought

letting go of what love was not

Is a better way than to pass the day

When blue waves ebb and flow

getting us to where we need to go.

Salty fragrance makes the seagulls dance.

Course planning directors take a chance.

Getting closer to horizons, they advance

Among waters and sails then blue becomes green then,

drawing curtains, changing the scene,

when blue waves ebb and flow

reaching the place we were intended to go.

Setting: Art Studio

Boishak and Raina see Raja Tharasa and Songeeta and wave hello. Raja Tharasa and Songeeta wave back to them.

Boishak: *(to Raina).* Okay, let's practice scales.

Raina sings a few notes off-scale.

Boishak: Let's try that again.

Raina sings a few notes correctly and improves.

Boishak: (sounds worried) Better!

Raina: I think I'm just stressed from my paper's due date.

Boishak: What are you writing about?

Raina: I have an opinion paper that the economy should be thought of as fluid and dynamic instead of static and concrete so that people more often consider sustainable use of resources across time for basic human needs.

Boishak: Any particular resource?

Raina: One idea is to have more access to clean water via irrigation systems from the ocean to dry lands or from the mountaintops and piping to wells with equalizing pressure gauges to have better

control over when access can be achieved and possibly used for bottling and selling water. Perhaps more apple plantations can be used for juice factories to be bottled and sold elsewhere. There could be a collaboration for those who make bottles from recycled plastics and sold jointly with the providers of water or juice.

Still at the Music Studio

Boishak: That sounds really interesting. Cool. Okay, let's try another set of music notes – oh hey, Raja Tharasa with Songeeta are walking over to us. Songeeta is in our band! Let's collaborate.

Raina: Oh, that's fortuitous!

Boishak: Try to sing the scale again.

Raina sings and improves.

Boishak: Great.

Songeeta: Hi guys, what are you working on?

Boishak: Please meet Raina, she's the singer I mentioned would be joining our band. She is spending some time away from graduate studies to help us with the upcoming fashion show performance!

Songeeta: Great! Good to meet you. What are you studying?

Raina: A hodgepodge of social issues from clean water supplies to a paper including the need for early education and teacher training and salary to improve the quality of support for young minds.

Raja Tharasa: Interesting. You should meet my friend Padma Sherni. She's studying public health and education policy issues also. She was planning to attend the fashion show we are performing for, but I think fashion show organizer Chandra has asked her to be the speaker or host of the show.

Songeeta: Great idea. And People always talk about the fact that teachers aren't paid enough.

Raina: True. And sure, I'd love to meet your friend. The teacher training programs can lead to more qualified teachers with higher degrees who can then demand a better standard of salary and pay. That leads to individuals who will recognize and know standards for teaching materials, educational toys, and curricula that foster healthy and happy infants and toddlers ready for other areas of their lives.

Boishak: That is really important. Do they have a music program at your center?

Raina: They had a music teacher, but that program needs to be brought back. The existing staff still sing songs together with the children: Something to think about for sure.

Songeeta: I'd love to work on a music program for kids in schools. Maybe the members of our band can work on something.

Boishak: That's an excellent idea, but for now, let's show you what we've been working on.

Raina: (a little unsure) I realize my voice was kind of rough at the start.

Boishak: That's Okay. You just started, and I'll give you the music sheets to practice with.

Songeeta: You'll be fine with some encouragement, and Raja Tharasa has agreed to be our keyboard player and newest member of our band.

Boishak: Hooray. That makes us a group with lead singer Songeeta, backup singer Raina instead of myself sometimes, keyboard player Raja Tharasa, Guitarist Bhanu…and our usual drummer.

Setting: the tea shop

Surya: *(to Chandra).* What are you sketching? Those designs look amazing.

Chandra: Oh, thank you. I'm just adding a few color mixes and color contrast matches for the fashion show outfits.

Surya: Is that by any chance for next week's show?

Chandra: Yes, I should have had this done by now, but just working out some perfectionist perspectives. Where did you hear about the show?

Surya: In the paper here that I write restaurant critiques for. I am also going because I am critiquing some aspects of the fashion show event. I am also waiting for the photography exhibit so I can critique that. I am a critical person for many events this week.

Chandra: (laughing) ha ha ha. I got that.

Surya: *(very serious).* Those are good designs.

Chandra: Thank you. You'll have to wait for the rest. This is just from a poster we had for some advertising.

Surya: And last-minute perfectionist perspectives?

Chandra: (laughing) Thank you for understanding. The photographer is Boishak, one of the servers here and you may have seen other members of the band performing for the show at this tea shop also.

Surya: Very interesting! I'd like to write a review if that's okay to attend?

Chandra: Yes, of course! The more, the merrier. There's a fashion show as part tryouts for people who might be recruited for a soap opera pilot. We are playing music for that event so we're happy that you're joining us.

Padma Sherni: And now rehearsal for the Soap opera pilot.

(Intended to be a colorful festive dance sequence of a few minutes intertwined with a fashion show…)

Raja Tharasa: (*checks his phone, and his actress friend is messaging him)*

Actress friend: Waaaait! We're outside with dresses. Sorry to intrude; however, I just overheard your entire conversation, and it sounds like you need a dress and pronto! I happen to know great places to get more dresses, and if you're interested, here's my business card. I've actually worked with your friend here in the past, and...

Actress friend to Raja Tharasa: I thought you looked familiar...

Padma Sherni: I saw my friend here disguised as Shriyadita C. London, one of the roles that his cousin was possibly going to play, and am just bantering with him...

Actress friend: Lovely, so then... if you'd like to try on some outfits, we'll wait out here...

Padma Sherni: Thank you, that's really nice of you. I am going to forward these to the festival participants.

Raja Tharasa: Great, the people who rehearsed can try them on and let you know of any adjustments before the weekend.

Setting: At the Café within walking distance from the outdoor stage rehearsal area.

Padma Sherni: Well, that was fantastic.

Raja Tharasa: What was?

Padma Sherni: The sandwich, do you want one?

Raja Tharasa: Oh, no thanks. How was the practice for the show?

Padma Sherni: Really good.

Raja Tharasa: And?

Padma Sherni: Don't worry, I like a guy; however, we need to rehearse the Bijoux Chandon storyline now that you have finally realized only, I can glamorously play the part. Actually a lot of people just started trying out.

Raja Tharasa: (sighs) Alright, then?

Padma Sherni: (sighs also). Actually, I really think you would be a good Shriyadita C. London. Someone else was playing the role, however they are working on tryouts. I propose that you accept my proposal to do a soap opera. We'll feature my photo with you, and even though it's like from 1995, maybe no one will know the difference. We'll explain it's really our prop from the event until we can re-enact it.

Raja Tharasa: Why would we re-enact your absconding to the women's restroom without telling me because your tights kept falling down while you were on the dance floor?

Padma Sherni: Okay, that's important. Thank you for waiting while I figured out what to do.

Raja Tharasa: My phone is beeping.

Raja Tharasa: (*answers the phone)*

Actress Friend: *(over the phone)* Do you know if there is a children's program *"bachcha-dher program"* practice venue somewhere that I also should send outfits for?

Raja Tharasa: Let me ask Padma Sherni

Padma Sherni: *Overhearing the question and responding.* The children's program rehearsal space? Yes, in three sets of classrooms! Please ask the musicians, they will know.

(Please see Appendix A, B, and C for children's stories!)

Raja Tharasa: (*Tells the actress friend the message and then returns to Padma Sherni.)* So, anyways, are you going to actually dress up?

Padma Sherni: If we actually make a soap opera pilot, we'll do a dance and music compilation fashion show and talk about the university setting of cultural organizations and dance competitions that take place all the while students maintain grades and relationships. It will be fantastic! I'll be the real Bijoux Chandon and obviously utilize whatever makeup I need to get through the ordeal, and you will be referred to as Shriyadita C. London, who has someone else trying to stand in for him when he has to leave to get a coffee or whatever...Sound good?

Raja Tharasa: Excellent! However…

Padma Sherni: Alright... here we go... The public event was celebrated in 1995; however, I'll try to fit into a white cream-colored dress again or any type of gown...

Raja Tharasa: In real life, will you please wear the Indian-style outfit that I thought you looked nice in?

Padma Sherni: A compliment for Moi? Thank you.

Raja Tharasa: Just in case anyone asks, can I ask what I am supposed to say to others about the story line?

Padma Sherni: Okay, sure. We're working on a soap opera pilot because any time a girl talks to a guy, it's considered flirtation anyways, even though I am being platonic and it's taken as such a rejection when earnestly a girl wanting to get to know a guy says, with trepidation "Let's be friends!"

Raja Tharasa: Maybe we should make this more authentic.

Raja Tharasa then holds Padma Sherni's hand.

Padma Sherni's jaw drops open in surprise.

Raja Tharasa: Will you please accept this samosa that I got for you?

Padma Sherni: *Laughing*

Raja Tharasa: Eats the share of the samosa intended for Padma Sherni.

Padma Sherni laughing and then scowling.

Padma Sherni: That's not funny. However, fortunately I have my own, and brings out from her bag, the savory snack in a crumpled-up napkin.

Raja Tharasa smiles and then turns to his friends in the band.

Raja Tharasa: Actually there is an entire box of snacks and drinks on the table over there. Someone preordered for the rehearsal participants. Please feel free to play some fun music for our festival dance party and fashion show as part of the soap opera pilot tryouts.

Padma Sherni: Sure, when will we meet up again? Let's make plans for after the program?

Raja Tharasa: Sure. I am going to return to this coffee shop in 1 year and maybe we can see if the music is still popular and playing at the place. Can you meet me there? Bring friends!

Padma Sherni: If I see you at the shop, and if I am visiting with any of my college acquaintances, like Harington Cooper, I might not act as if I know you already, because then everyone will likely start asking for favors. They also have their own reasons, because sometimes she uses her regular name, Sejal S., however, even when people westernize their names, the names are usually similar to the original name. I am still unsure about this request; however, she

might be at the show. She wanted to try out for the soap opera pilot also.

Raja Tharasa: Okay, however, I am happy to support, however they might already have their own supports and connections. Possibly they are trying to do something related to their own goals.

Padma Sherni: Yes. Maybe we need a mentorship program?

Raja Tharasa: That's a great idea! Okay, talk to you later. I am going to talk with friends and attend practice and work for awhile.

Padma Sherni: Sure, I will catch up with you later! Thank you for visiting and we hope you enjoy a great show!

Note: Padma Sherni is walking towards her apartment.

The phone rings again. Padma Sherni answers the phone.

Harington Cooper: Hi, what are you up to?

Padma Sherni: Oh, it's just you. I thought it was going to be a guy, and instead, it's just one of my female friends.

Harington Cooper: *laughter.* Are you free? Let's go to the coffee shop. No horse trainers or anything.

Padma Sherni: *laughter.* Actually, I'll make coffee or tea here instead. Just come over.

Harington Cooper: Okay.

Padma Sherni: I need a baked good. Let's go to the Green Sugar coffee shop from here.

Harington Cooper: Alright. Let's go.

At the coffee shop of Padma Sherni:

Padma Sherni: I was just thinking how awesome it would be if I was ever on a date with an international actor!

Harington Cooper: Why would you think that you would be on a date with an international actor?

Padma Sherni: What sort of question is that?

Harington Cooper: Okay, okay – like who?

Padma Sherni: Like…Shriyadita C. London

Harington Cooper: *roaring laughter* – You're never going to get a date with Shriyadita C. London.

Padma Sherni: I'm just saying…anything can happen if you dream of it…

Harington Cooper: *laughing…* Okay, okay… Where would you go?

Padma Sherni: Well…

Harington Cooper: Oh, look!

Shriyadita C. London, getting coffee at the counter.

Padma Sherni: *Starts laughing.* wow…

Harington Cooper: *What?* Ask him out…right now.

Padma Sherni: Are you crazy? *Contemplating for a moment.* Okay.

Harington Cooper: *Roaring laughter*

Padma Sherni: I'll pretend we're friends that haven't seen each other for a long time… or I'll simply run into him, and we'll drop our things, and then our eyes will meet, and we'll gaze romantically at each other…

Harington Cooper: Don't make him spill his coffee, and you'd better hurry up because he's leaving…

Padma Sherni: I can't, I'm not ready… I have to prepare!

Harington Cooper: He just left. Oh! He forgot his book!

Padma Sherni: *runs to pick it up. Says out loud.* The book is entitled, Shriyadita C. London and other Tales. Interesting.

Harington Cooper: Go Go Go!

Padma Sherni: Excuse me! You forgot your book! And here's my business card if you ever forget anything else - You seem kind of familiar.

Shriyadita C. London, wearing sunglasses, laughs.

Padma Sherni: Actually, I'm an aspiring writer… Maybe if you get a chance to read my stuff, which would be awesome. Hope you have a nice day.

Shriyadita C. London: Thank you. *Smiles and leaves Padma Sherni.*

Padma Sherni: He's really nice.

Harington Cooper: *laughter.* Well, I have to go now, but that was fun.

Padma Sherni: Okay, talk to you later.

Padma Sherni goes home, and her phone rings.

Note: After leaving from the coffee shop meeting with Harington Cooper, Padma Sherni returns home. Her phone is ringing…

A literary agent has called: My name is Michael, a literary agent from a publishing company. I just got a call from a guy named Brendon. You might know him as Detective Vikram? There is a manuscript on my desk and we're trying to figure out if the author wants to remain anonymous or not. Your contact information was included. Do you know anything about this poetry set? Something called "Sparkstone Poetry"? It's rather an upset collection of distraught angsty emotions. What's the background story? We're trying to figure out if it could work on some projects possibly. Just trying to get clarification.

Referring to the following:

"On the verge of realizing that not all relationships work out in one's twenties, a character using the name "Sparkstone" writes poetry anonymously to express her distraught feelings and realizations about friendships and unmet expectations in romantic relationships. She goes to a coffee shop in Central Square, Cambridge, Massachusetts, to write poetry intended to be music lyrics and starts to study music to deal with her emotions. Although she briefly took piano and singing lessons in her youth, she participates in Indian singing lessons and western guitar lessons during this time. Given she formerly depended on

others to explore her likes and dislikes, when they start to drop out of her life due to marriage, or relocations, she is confronted with facing who she is with or without them. She later realizes she is essentially searching for her own identity to hold constant in the face of changing times. She chronicles her effort through journal writing and searching for others who are going through a similar experience. Realizing that so many people are going through similar feelings, she concludes that the human relationship experience is a complex one for most people. She tosses out the journal and dives into living her life for two year without the people she used to know. One day upon cleaning her apartment before moving, she discovers not all is lost. Her perceptions and emotions of past events from that time are discovered in her poetry booklet and are shared below. The writing expresses angsty sadness and anger and then eventually describes closure and hope. (During the year the poetry was written, the author was studying and working on her masters thesis, imbibing coffee, really taking music lessons and taking walks along the Charles River in Cambridge, Massachusetts.)".

Padma Sherni: Hi Michael. That's very mysterious, however I have a regular job, and maybe I know the author, however I need time to think this over. Maybe I could call you back in a few days?

Journal reflections consequently are continued to review notes:

Sparkstone Poetry

by Pialee Roy

Wednesday, September 26, 2007

Calm Observation

I had forgotten all these emotions

Bottled up like anti-love potions

Since then all have moved on

The thought of reconciliation gone

Amazing what a little space can do

And now we all embark on love anew.

Saturday, October 8, 2005

Tell Me

I want to leave the past behind cause it weighs me down
Oh - but I want to pass the time
with you around
I want to breathe in fall air
not collapse in my office chair
I want to know someone will be there
Are you there? Are you there?
Do you even care - anymore??

I don't want these tears streaming down my face
I don't want to fall prey again to the chase
Can you tell me you will be there
Are you there? Are you there?
Do you even care - anymore??
Okay, so I only think of you
Oh - maybe we'd be better off as two
Tell me what you wanna do
I think maybe only you would do
I want to know you're going to be there
Tell me that you still care
And that you will forevermore
If open the door, please tell me

Saturday, October 8, 2005

Only You

So you think you're the only song writer there is

And you think you're the only genius that lives

Well, I'm here to say, there's more than just you

Look, my heart's bruised up all black and blue

Singing' out Singing' out

Instead of screaming the shouts

Oh to soothe the pain

I chanced on solace in the rain

Now I'm facing illusions once again

And I realize that's all you ever were

Sunday, October 9, 2005

Lamplight

When you're finally ready to let go,
can you really ever say goodbye?
Are there words you're supposed to know
or do you fake a smile with a lie?
I see the good light waiting to take me to a new place
but I cant seem to reach for it.
There's just one more thing I have to face
before my waiting lamp's no longer lit.
Could you just explain to me this insanity
of how my heart just got ripped right out of me?
Was the cliche true, too blind to see?
What trouble encroached upon my clarity?
Peace be with me (and you).

Monday, October 10, 2005

The Lovestruck

So you made your decision
now I'll make mine
You crafted our end with precision
an you're getting along just fine
I'm making it my mission
to stand out in the crowds
The strength has arisin
to get my head out of the clouds
Oh, it ain't fair, it ain't fair
Do the lovestruck last anywhere?
You never asked me what I thought
You never cared about what I might want
Now my pain has shifted to anger getting hot
realizing you came back just to taunt.
Get out, Get out, Get out of this space
It's finally my turn to erase your face
But it gets hard with all the memories
they start to grasp, strangle, and seize me.
Oh, it ain't fair, it ain't fair
Do the lovestruck last anywhere?
Oh, it ain't fair, it ain't fair
Do the lovestruck last anywhere?

Monday, October 10, 2005

This Circle

There are moments I still think of you
when my heart won't let me see
that these two souls divided
aren't anything but meant to be
But you choose to live with pain instead
while I remain worshiping what's now dead
Walk along this circle with me.
Walk along this circle with me.
How do we or can we ever reconcile?
How much longer is awhile?
Can forever apart end today?
Will we ever ask each other to wait and stay?
But you choose to live with pain instead
while I remain worshiping what's now dead
Walk along this circle with me.
Walk along this circle with me.
Are we so fargone that we can't get back?
Have we walked too long on separate tracks?
I can't rack my head with questions anymore
I'm still stuck standing in the downpour.
But you choose to live with pain instead
while I remain worshiping what's now dead
Walk along this circle with me.

Monday, October 10, 2005 (edited 12/24/2017)

Why

It was the way you disrespected me
It was the way you made me feel insecure
It was the way you controlled me
Which I'm not allowing anymore
It was the way you disregarded me
It was the way you talked down to me like a child
It was your mean words
Caustic, far from mild
It was your mean words
It was your casual aloofness
It was your lack of sensitivity
and lies you did not confess
It was the way you tried to take away my power
It was the way your personality against mine tried to tower
It was functioning only on your time table
based on what you wanted when you wanted it
like - attention, company, affection
your attributes, without regard to others, you flaunted
I had sunk down so low.
You tried to keep me there
You made me feel like I had to need you.
That I had to give you the role of my dependence on you
What a slick way to push me around on your convenience.

Your attempted negative influence
I detested the way you put me down
I hated your manipulation
I was left nested in your facade
I hated your selfishness
I hated your self-centered ego
I hated the way you had to be better than others
all the time having to be in the know
I'm not sorry for looking out for myself.
I'm not sorry for trying to move on
I'm not sorry for trying to find reciprocity
I'm not sorry for trying to talk to you
I'm not sorry for wanting to work it out with you
You hurt me so deeply
You don't deserve my friendship or love
I don't know if I can forgive you for how you treated me
I've learned many lessons Especially on how important it is
to take care of oneself

I do believe that we repeat our mistakes until we learn from them
I have learned and now my confident words are on a public shelf

Perhaps a Friend pulled me away from you
because someone like you was not meant to be in my life
That's okay and now I'm letting go of this strife

Wednesday, October 12, 2005

Sometimes

Sometimes...

You hurl, scream, and kick to fight.

You push them out with all your might.

You scoff enraged, fire, and spit.

You do nothing but scowl and sit.

Sometimes you have to face your metaphorical demons

Sometimes it's better not looking for reasons.

Sometimes wisdom comes with new seasons.

Sometimes...

Monday, October 13, 2005

About Heart

You never actually cared for me
The kind of love I deserved you could never be
So loud about what you are not
You'll reach your grave early and there you'll rot
So quick to point the finger
Instead of looking first into the mirror
What memories of you will linger?
when the truth surfaces?
People will come to know your motive and heart
that drove your well-oiled insincerity from the start
And your karmic mistakes will catch you ablaze
where justice will be served in your final days.

Sunday, October 16, 2005

Past Time

Who could have asked
for an opportunity such as this
With obstacles unmasked
Working out both hit and miss?
These less than serious rhymes
Unwind with passing time
Not meant for him or her
Releasing emotions as they occur.

Thursday, October 27, 2005

Acceptance

The tears I want to cry won't flow anymore.
There's no one else coming through my door.
I have stopped looking up and hoping
and gradually this has ceased my moping.
I'm learning to spend time on my own.
I'm much happier this way.
Don'tt care if there's a ringing phone.
I shrug off what most people say anyway.
Dumped the tattered old baggage
Kept some memoirs in a safe package.
Sealed it with perforated bandage
Will protect it from future rampage.
Now I've found an outlet to heal my heart.
Giving my soul a chance for a fresh start.
Accepting the present is smart
for the past and future aren't so far apart.

Sunday, October 30, 2005

The Wait

Overhead The Golden Age echoes
on life's sound system
and I keep running and running
sweaty palms and out of breath
to get to where you are.
But when I've finally reached
You've just gone on farther.
Even the slow motion of the honey falling from the tree,
and all the uncertainty, moves too fast
I can't reach you or the place you were at last
and you won't wait...
It takes me time to get there
But once I'm there you're nowhere
and I'm in a disheveled state.
You were just here but then I see your shadow in the distance
you turn your head as if you heard your named
called out by chance
and my eyebrows arch grateful that you stopped en route..
You're going to wait...
Then my smile exploded into liquid diamonds
like the glass blown out.
You didn't see me though I pushed myself again to run.
You rounded the corner and I don't know which one.

It's a cruel twist of fate.
Just beyond the trees
I saw a man
I thought he was you.
but he didn't have your beard nor your strum
and I didn't recognize the village he said he came from.
Now I've tripped and scraped my knees.
They're all pointing and laughing at me.
but you won't wait...
My slumped spirit can't seem to squeeze through the gate.
I asked someone if they had seen you.
They replied, "of course"
and that you're doing great
They said, you're going to a beautiful city of lights
in a hopeful and satisfied state.
Now I know you don't need to wait.
Left behind I'm so tired but I can't sleep.
I brave on to keep the harbinger of peace.
But every day now for a year I weep
into the arms of my own "fleece*
and I march on for miles and miles

*literally, not metaphorically.

Sunday, December 24, 2017

Calm Expression

Old emotions revisited
Once again opening the shoebox lid
To remember and reconcile
A medley of feelings after a long while
Thinking of new friendships and old flames
Looking forward; Not placing blames
Appreciating life's lesson
without unexpected apologies or confession
To simply be tough yet
compassionate
For myself and others both mending and healing
Through expressive poetry and words free wheeling

Conclusion

After some time, I have reflected on why this artistry has resulted from the nuances of friendships, romanticism, and awful angsty poetry. You see, there's been some drama...and too much time on my own self reflecting in journals. Other than all that:

Way back a few years ago, my parents tried to send me on a semi-arranged date with a guy by inviting him over for lunch. I was perplexed...my mother cooked a bunch of Indian food and left the lentils in the pressure cooker for too long. It wasn't anything bad, but it still hit the ceiling, and we only had extra time to clean up the dripping ceiling because he was still in his car trying to find his shoes, which he drove without.

I'm sure other people can empathize. I used to visit friends during Thanksgiving. During one encounter, we enjoyed a variety of cuisine and devoured most of a delicious, cooked turkey of course. As a friendly gesture, the family invited a semi-arranged visitor for the daughter, not realizing they were vegetarian. While the rest of us were distracted by a football game, with impassioned shouts of "throw the ball!", "toss the ball!" Suddenly, we heard, "Toss the carcass! toss the carcass!" Lol. only a slight creative embellishment here...

While traveling in India, my friend, who I now acknowledge cared about trying to find me a nice guy, introduced me to a relative's family member who, like me, was from the USA. I was at

a remote location that still used a dial-up internet connection, but I saw a nice message from a friend's cousin about a dog that pissed when he got excited to see anyone. I had plenty of time to think of a response because then we had lode shading and then lost the connection completely. After returning to the USA, that same friend invited us to a housewarming party. Her acquaintance attended as well. I was stressed about the etiquette expectations because we had other mutual acquaintances. Still hopeful of being a successful matchmaker, my friend invited me over to this family gathering at which the now skeptical interest prodded me about why I hadn't responded to his email. I genuinely couldn't respond, and there wasn't a good internet connection, which sounded like a total excuse, Lol...so I changed the subject, "What do you do for work" he said he worked on mutual funds, a term that was foreign to me, so I looked at him skeptically as to whether or not that was a real thing. To make matters worse, the matchmaker's fiancé set me up with one of their other friends, and we were all at the same buck-and-doe party, and I've never seen as competitive a musical chairs event for either of them to sit next to me, and in total awe, I tried politely to stifle my giggles, but when the person across from you is trying to do the same thing, it results in needing to take a piss. I'm not the dog, and I was just overwhelmed and excused myself to the ladies' room and of course, the matchmaker was waiting for me, and I was so flustered that I just ended up crying

from the stress, Lol. Five years later, I found the email and thought I ought to respond nicely as a friendly gesture, given our mutual acquaintance and all, just to see where he was in life, and I'm guessing he has respectfully just continued to live his life, Lol.

More details later...

Wait! I wanted to tell you that I finally figured out my dil pickle dilemma, which is that regardless of what goes on in life, I must remain a constant to myself and strategize how work, home and out of the home, contribute to wellness, both for myself and others. This is an important activity with a changing set of priorities given the context of the time, and as always, life and its dilemmas are best resolved with a good sense of humor.

With love,

Padma Sherni, a.k.a. Pialee Roy, Ph.D.

Thank you for your support!

Appendix A

The Mystery of the Ancient Heirloom

PADMA SHERNI

LOTUS TIGRESS

RESILIENT STRENGTH BASE FROM BOTH INDEPENDENT AND COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES

Padma Sherni's car arrived at the gateway of a beautiful house surrounded by a garden and a guest house in a Bunyan Forest grove, an old neighborhood, near Kharagpur, India. A small museum was attached to the guest house property and led to a pathway to the main house. The house and property originally belonged to Ambassador Garry & Zinnia Sulekha. Both are world travelers and host people internationally. Garry works as a scientist who attended many conferences and gave university talks. Zinnia Sulekha invites both students and professionals to tea parties and luncheons and dinners. Both Garry and Zinnia Sulekha write to her granddaughter, Padma Sherni, to communicate the latest updates. Padma Sherni at this time was 15 years old and had just started high school.

Now Professor Kagojpothro, a middle-aged man of tall height, with some gray hairs within an otherwise fully matted dark brown head of hair, took his role as family friend quite seriously. He was keeper of the estate, when the grandparents of Padma Sherni traveled until Padma Sherni's sixteenth birthday when Zinnia Sulekha had planned to retire in another location with her husband in West Bengal, India. Both Zinnia Sulekha and her husband Garry often wrote letters to Padma Sherni to visit them.

Professor Kagojpothro lived on one of the properties, the tree-lined and flowery grounds, while working on some research. He

was delighted to have Padma Sherni visit from time to time. So, with her grandparents' letter in hand, Padma Sherni explained to Professor Kagojpothro that this time she was excited to be visiting to retrieve a jewelry bracelet set for her sixteenth birthday from her grandmother's original house. The multicolor semi-precious stone charm bracelet came from a similar location as a multicolored stone friendship bracelet that originally came in a pair from Darjeeling to Bunyan Forest Grove. Both were to be a gift to Padma Sherni for her wear and to then also a gift to another friend. Padma Sherni decided that she would keep a friendship bracelet and her American friend, who she attributed the Indian name, "Sneha" (referring to "friend") would be the recipient of a friendship bracelet also, and they would find a loyal female friend or family member to gift the other charm bracelet to. A prediction in her horoscope led her to believe that she would have a future daughter named Sapna Nachi friendly to other families in the network of friendly acquaintanceships. Sapna Nachi and siblings should be the recipient of a jewelry item also. In fact, all the children of Padma Sherni would be gifted a jewelry item.

During this visit, Padma Sherni's grandparents were temporarily travelling elsewhere but they encouraged her to enjoy her stay and explore on her own instead, until they returned.

Professor Kagojpothro then explained some unexpected news: "Unfortunately, the display case was found open, the ancient heirloom bracelet, and an information card, and mapbook about the jewelry piece are missing." He continued, "The guard left a week ago for vacation and might be able to help identify other information when he returns." Padma Sherni was disappointed but determined to resolve this mystery of where the missing items had disappeared to. Professor Kagojpothro showed Padma Sherni what remained of the display case. She brushed her medium length black hair aside and inspected carefully with her dark brown eyes.

"Is there a library I can go to?" asked the curious Padma Sherni. "I'd like to double check information about the bracelet with the library books there after checking the moonstone decorated notebook, and computer," she explained. The computer bag was decorated with a beaded briefcase to indicate information about the family heirloom's gemstone qualities and family tree. I need to find some historical information again until those items are retrieved! "Yes, you can follow the pathway to the library to go explore further. There are signs along the way that will get you to your destination," explained Professor Kagojpothro. Padma Sherni explained, "The computer contains a database with more information about semi-precious stones and how they relate to my astrology reading. These are to be learned about somewhat on my sixteenth birthday, this year, and that's why I'm disappointed and

surprised that the bracelet is missing. I feel someone is trying to prevent me from learning something important." Professor Kagojpothro was sympathetic and stated, "We certainly must retrieve all your items by your birthday!" Padma Sherni agreed, "Yes, that gives us a few days. I hope we can work quickly. When the item is retrieved, one bracelet, I've decided will be sent to Sneha." Professor Kagojpothro suggested reassuringly, "Let's go have lunch and discuss this mystery more. I'm happy to help you however I can. I knew your grandparents as a personal friend and they had many international guests for tea parties, so if needed maybe you can reach out to some friends in different places for your inquiry!" Padma Sherni was delighted with the recommendation. She exclaimed, "That's a really good idea! I think the cultural history of the area will help me understand the traditions of my own heritage better." As Professor Kagojpothro and Padma Sherni enjoyed lunch, the professor suggested, "Maybe Laina and her group of artifact collectors would be good guides for you. They are students of art history and folklore. Laina herself is a bright and shining student, here in India, just as her name suggests and you can invite Sneha to work with you here or remotely as she is friendly to you and encouraging of your travels. The artifact collectors have access to the library and museum locally that I think you'll appreciate. Why don't you ask them to show you around the area? You haven't been to Bunyan Forest Grove before." Padma

Sherni responded, "Thank you. I was going to go explore the library or museum on my own anyways and will be happy to meet with them." Padma Sherni excused herself from lunch and decided to go for a stroll. The weather was beautiful, some sunrays amidst the shadow of the trees, and marshmallow like clouds floating in the sky, with a gentle breeze carrying a scent of vanilla. The fragrance wafted through the air from a local tea shop and bakery. Padma Sherni walked through a pathway clearing in the forest and tied ribbon in a bowtie on some of the branches, like she had learned to do from somewhere before, in order to not forget her way to return. She kept these gadgets of things and a toolkit in her purse. She trudged along, and eventually, a clearing opened to a water way, where she discovered a reflection of brass on a square box with a geometric design in the sand.

Padma Sherni thought the item should be returned to a "lost and found" office immediately and decided to take the square box finding to the artifact collectors for some guidance. She stopped by at the tea shop to bring a few pastries for her guides and noticed a couple talking nervously on the corner about not wanting to go on any more tourist adventures or shopping now. "Boating might be a good idea, but I'm not willing to go anywhere else right now," Padma Sherni overheard them saying as she left the tea shop.

Laina and the artifact collectors greeted Padma Sherni happily. “Why don’t we open this geometric box together slowly and see what’s inside?” Laina suggested. “The pastry box or the box found in the sand?” joked Padma Sherni as they all laughed together. They decided to have the pastries and discuss options for opening the box before making an effort. The geometric design resembled the display case border where the items originally were.

They then looked up some information in their library and found that the geometric design was from a local craftsman who had a woodshop for custom built items in 1950. They did not waste any time in entering that year into the combination lock. They turned the box on an angle and some sand sifted out. The box easily opened to reveal two airmail letters. The letters were each written by a couple who were introduced by their friends: Ambassador Garry and Zinnia Sulekha. Padma Sherni was very excited.

One of the letters indicated needing to protect the ancient heirloom charm bracelet jewelry from being purchased by someone for a museum. It was a valuable item because the stones had been collected in ancient times in India and passed down as a charm bracelet set among the women in the family. Padma Sherni called Laina… “Let’s go to the lost and found office and see what other information we can find.” The couple at the lost and found office by the boathouse were delighted to meet Padma Sherni and the

others. They were the couple that had left a copy in the sand for tourists to enjoy some history and mystery. We have a replica here at the office and then we direct tourists to the local shops by the water. Everyone examined the replica look alike of the birthstone charm bracelet. It was very pretty. "I think there's something real to this now though," said Padma Sherni. "The real charm bracelet is missing?" the couple asked in a surprised tone. "Don't worry the real heirloom is bound to turn up somewhere.

How are you spending your day tomorrow? Feel free to take a boat and enjoy the water to relax," the couple offered. "Thank you. I will," said Padma Sherni.

The next day, Padma Sherni went to the boathouse and went rowing with a guide to learn more about the region. The area included an island off the main coast of an Asian mainland. There were many travelers by boat who would arrive to trade merchandise from 1800s onwards, but her grandmother's family didn't move to the area until the 1900s when her father established a law office, where later Ambassador Garry would file for patents from his scientific work with the government in India. Zinnia Sulekha's family also were a family of zamindars or landowners. So, they received some other revenue from rental property. After Zinnia Sulekha married Ambassador Garry and finally settled in with a home in the 1960s, they maintained the inheritance of the

law office with a temporary position of Mayor of the town, where they lived, and passed on some responsibilities of maintenance to the locals. Padma Sherni, who lived in the USA, visits them sometimes. She learned that, historically, the traders of merchandise who sold tea, spices, silk, and cotton clothing lived on the properties of Zinnia Sulekha. There were also wood carvings, marble rock items, and sometimes gemstones.

Now the area has become a popular tourist destination for its scenic beauty on the clear turquoise water along with good weather. Now in present day time, Padma Sherni saw many different stalls of items being sold including t-shirts, and seashell jewelry, hats, and sunglasses, some semi- precious stones to make jewelry with, and a box variety of spices to cook with. She bought a few items and looked for something similar to the birthstone charm bracelet without much luck. She saw the nervous couple pointing at some of the seashell jewelry and arguing in the distance.

Padma Sherni decided to avoid them. Fortunately, she ran into Laina again who then invited her to spend time with the artifact collectors who would be attending an auction that afternoon. At the auction, many items were shown and some purchased by the artifact collectors. After some time, mention of a jewelry piece that looked like the birthstone charm bracelet was presented. A jewelry box with a geometric design was also shown

that seemed to be part of a collection that resembled the box found in the sand as well as the display case where the original items went missing.

Padma Sherni and Laina talked to each other and nodded in agreement that Padma Sherni would bid and Laina would be a back-up support if more funds were needed. Padma Sherni waited for a few minutes to see if anyone bartered or bid on the items. Just as they expected, a lady wearing a bowl-shaped hat, looking quite sophisticated, placed a bid for one hundred dollars. "One hundred and fifty dollars," said a nervous couple in the corner. Padma Sherni recognized them from the tea shop and boathouse and immediately placed a bid for two hundred dollars. "For sentimental purposes these items are worth so much more, but I'm just trying to keep up" Padma Sherni explained to Laina. Laina nodded sympathetically. The lady wearing the bowl-shaped hat then bid eight hundred dollars in a very determined and bold move. "Eight hundred and fifty dollars" bid the nervous couple! Padma Sherni was very concerned and checked with Laina about her funds and then cautiously bid nine hundred dollars. Next, the lady in the hat bid one thousand dollars and Padma Sherni hesitated, realizing this was getting too competitive and unreasonable. The auctioneer sold the items to the lady in the bowl-shaped hat and Padma Sherni was so tearful. She thanked Laina for her company. Laina said confidently, "Don't worry, so many of

these items are often brought to our shop for a check of their true value and I can convince them to donate to the museum." Padma Sherni said in a worried tone, "There is no guarantee the items will show up and please remember pieces belong to me instead of in the museum according to my grandmother's wishes. There was a reason why my grandmother wanted me to have this on my birthday and I don't yet know what it is. I'm so disappointed." "Ask the Professor if he has any ideas. Hopefully we'll figure this out soon. At least we now know who has the items!" said Laina optimistically.

Back at the house Padma Sherni looked up information on her moonstone notebook and computer about the items and the woman in the bowl-shaped hat. She learned that the woman was an art and jewelry trader on vacation in the Bunyan Grove Forest area. In order to take her mind off of some of the day's concerns, Padma Sherni decided to focus on happier thoughts. She asked Professor Kagojpothro if she could have a tea party on her birthday to continue her grandmother's tradition. "If the items don't turn up by then maybe it would be nice to mingle with new friends until I think of a better idea," stated Padma Sherni.

Professor Kagojpothro agreed and said the guard would be back in time and that would be alright. The next day, Laina called excitedly, "Padma Sherni, the woman with the bowl-shaped hat

stopped by, just as I thought she might, and she wants to put the items in the museum. What should we do? She also mentioned that she received the items from the auction and was concerned about how the items found their way to the auction in the first place. She spoke to the auctioneer who claimed it was donated." Padma Sherni thought for a moment and then asked, "Do you think she would be willing to donate the items back to the family if we open a family-owned museum on the guest house property? I discovered that she is an art and jewelry trader. Or could you ask if she would be willing to return the items to the family of the original owner? I'd like to meet with her. I have a hunch about how the items got to the auction in the first place. I'm waiting for the guard to return so I can ask him." "Okay, I'll ask and explain," Laina and Sneha stated.

In the meantime, Professor Kagojpothro introduced Padma Sherni to Guard Boontoni. "Guard Boontoni, do you have a guestbook that lists all of the people that stayed in the guest houses during the past week? Some items were stolen from the display case, and I have a hunch that the nervous couple I saw at both the tea shop and at the auction, may have stayed at the guest house and wandered further than they were supposed to out of curiosity. Can you please check?" inquired Padma Sherni.

The guard found from the guest book that the couple was still staying at the guest house and questioned their whereabouts. He

then matched fingerprints on the display case to the couple and they admitted that they had stolen the items, sold them to the auction manager and then tried to bid for the items at a lower price. They had run out of money on their vacation and did not make a good decision about how to spend their time. The guard assigned them to community service at the local tea shop with the tea shop's permission after one day in jail in order to earn money to repay people and buy their tickets back home.

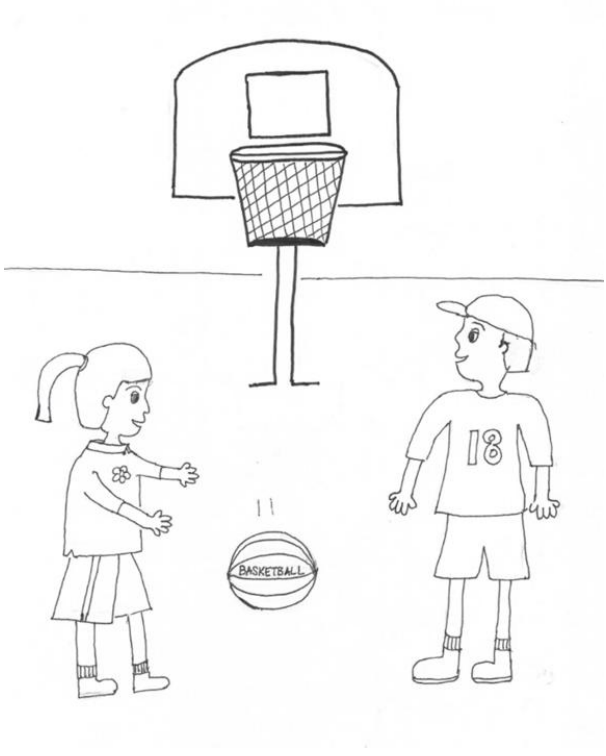
Padma Sherni and the Professor, then met with Laina and the artifact collectors, and the lady in the bowl-shaped hat to explain what had happened. Padma Sherni invited everyone to a birthday tea party after happily receiving the items back from the art and jewelry trader. The lady with the bowl-shaped hat agreed to attend the tea party and was curious to know more about Zinnia Sulekha. Padma Sherni also invited the tea shop owners, the couple from the lost and found office, and some of the people from the boat house to celebrate her birthday. She had made quite a few friends in a matter of a couple of days! She happily received her items back and placed them back in the display case until the next day, her birthday.

Guard Boontoni explained that Padma Sherni had permission to access this display case at any time from this birthday onwards. As Padma Sherni examined the jewelry box further, she found a

compartment where the map book had been. She was so happy and relieved. There was a description of Grandmother Zinnia Sulekha's travels and the items she collected during those trips. She found a birthday wish listed for the ancient heirloom and the jewelry piece sparkled with a note in the box from her grandmother that read, "Happy Birthday Padma Sherni. You have discovered the birthstone charm bracelet with a map booklet. I hope you enjoy many good adventures and good luck. Sing and dance. Wisdom and knowledge you will gain on a tour as you carefully wish and learn of your heritage and some folklore." Padma Sherni was delighted and then placed one of the birthstone charm bracelets on her wrist, locked up the rest of the items and joined her new friends in the garden for her birthday tea party.

Appendix B

The Summer Basketball Camp



When the school term was completed, Surya, Betty, and Jenny visited Padma Sherni, often. They had summer vacation and were trying to think of how to spend their time. They lived in the same neighborhood. On Sunday, they went swimming together at Jenny's house which had a pool. On Monday, they played basketball together at Luke's house. On Tuesday, they played their musical instruments in their music band where they practiced together once a week. On Wednesday, they drew pictures for a sidewalk chalk drawing contest and painting class. On Thursday, they had soccer practice. On Friday, they watched a movie together. Saturday, they baked cookies and brownies together for a bake sale fund raiser for school. On Sunday, they decided to volunteer at a library to help put books away after participating in a reading group and story time.

The children had a busy schedule and enjoyed one another's company. They went to the playground the following week where there were sign-ups for a two-week basketball camp. The boys played in one group and the girls played in another. They would get together for lunch at the playground and at the picnic tables they would trade snacks and stories about their practice sessions.

They learned that basketball counted the scores for the game in four parts called quarters. Sometimes people would cheer and dance at half time, presented after the first two quarters. Each

basket was worth either one point, two points, or three points depending on how close or far away from the hoop a player tried to throw the ball from. Getting the ball in the hoop or making a basket from further away gave more points. The children also learned there were five players on each team: a center who stood in the middle, two forwards that stood at the back near the hoop, and two guards that stood in front of the center diagonally on the right and left. The goal was to make a basket on the other side of the basketball court from the side each team started from.

One day, the basketball coaches told the campers that a bus would arrive from another neighborhood for a friendly basketball game the next day. Some of the kids looked forward to meeting new people while others were concerned about whether the home team was prepared enough to win the game.

Both teams had practiced for two weeks running around their own basketball court, and dribbling the ball, passing the ball, instead of holding on to the ball or hogging the ball too much, and making free throws to get the ball to swish into the hoop. Then when the new kids arrived everyone noticed that they were fast, and swift, and had obviously practiced a lot! Both sets of the parents sat in the bleachers to cheer and encourage both the boys' and the girls' teams.

At first the basketball seemed to fly right past the home teams. The boys' team was evenly matched through half time with one point each at the end of the first quarter. Then a really tall kid, named Alfonso, showed up as the center player on the visiting team and Patrick, the center from the home team, was overshadowed by the height. Patrick decided if he got the ball, he would pass to his teammates after Alfonso made several baskets in a row.

By half-time or the end of the second quarter, the teams were still evenly matched with five points each. Alfonso's team eventually scored more with seven points to five points in the third quarter. Then Patrick got a chance to make two free throws near the hoop and the teams were evenly matched again at the start of the fourth quarter with seven points each. Everyone felt tense and excited. Then Surya and Luke received the ball and passed and dribbled back and forth until Patrick was free. Alfonso was tall and blocked one of Patrick's attempts to make a basket, but then Patrick quickly reached out to grab the ball on the rebound and aimed and threw the ball towards the hoop carefully for a successful swish to the basket! The score increased by one point to eight points for the home team! Then, Alfonso made a basket for his team, from far away, which gave them three points just as the timer buzzed to win the game. The final score was 10 points to 8 points, in favor of the visiting team. The other team was good and had a star player. The teamwork of the home team was very good effort. They all shook

hands and said "good game" with good sportsmanship at the end. People clapped, and then joined the parents to watch and cheer on the girls' game which was just finishing also.

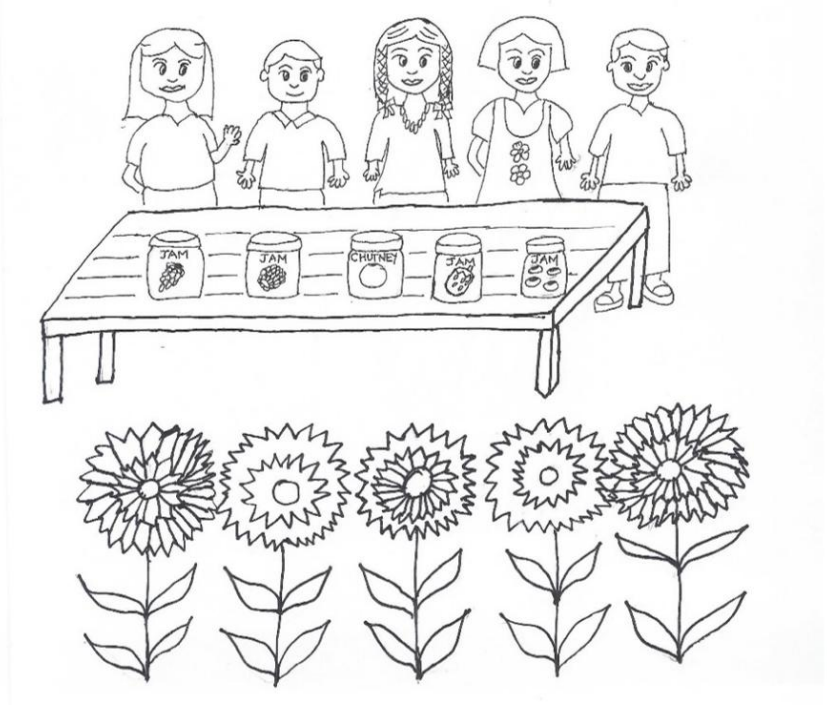
The girls also were outscored at the start of the fourth quarter with eight points to seven points. Padma Sherni cheered on her teammates: Jenny and Betty and others from the bleachers. She had already played in the first quarter and made a basket. Then she changed the playing time with Jenny. Betty scored a basket, and the teams were scored evenly with eight points each at the end of the fourth quarter which indicated overtime and one more extra quarter to finish the game. Both of the teams were fast, could dribble and pass the ball well and aim towards the basket with amazing skills! It was fun to watch the basketball swish into the hoop!

Padma Sherni rejoined the game during overtime. Then Jenny scored a basket and eventually Betty made another one, and Padma Sherni scored one more for a score of eleven to seven points and the home team won. The home team and visiting teams shook hands and showed good sportsmanship smiling genuinely and saying, "good game". The home team then treated the visiting team to pizza, fruit, water and juice, and for dessert they enjoyed brownies and cookies. The visiting team then invited the home team to their neighborhood the following week just for friendly practice games.

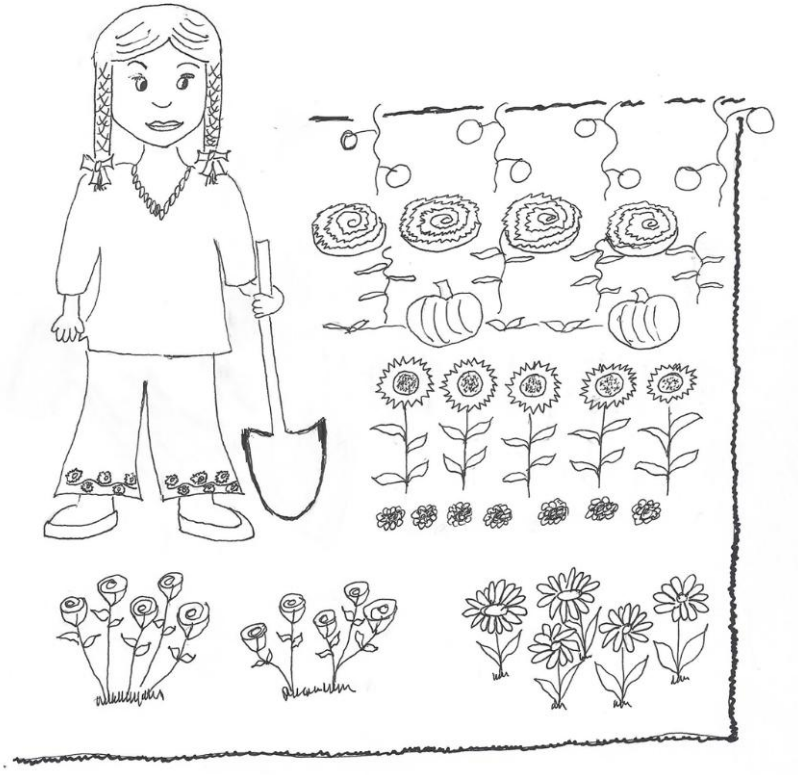
Now the home team became the visiting team. They travelled by bus and sang songs along the way. They were treated to basketball coaching and then pizza, drinks, and dessert. Everyone, including Padma Sherni and her friends, enjoyed the summer basketball camp.

Appendix C

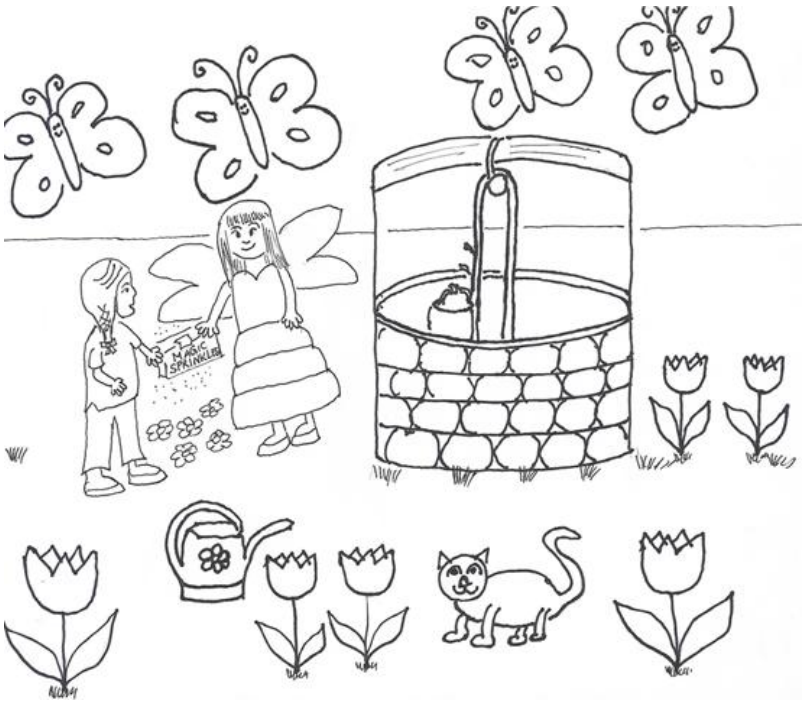
The Garden Story



One day, Padma Sherni decided to be a gardener. She began to plant flowers and vegetables. In the flower garden, she had roses, daisies, sunflowers, and marigolds. In the vegetable garden, she had peas, cabbage, tomatoes, and pumpkins.



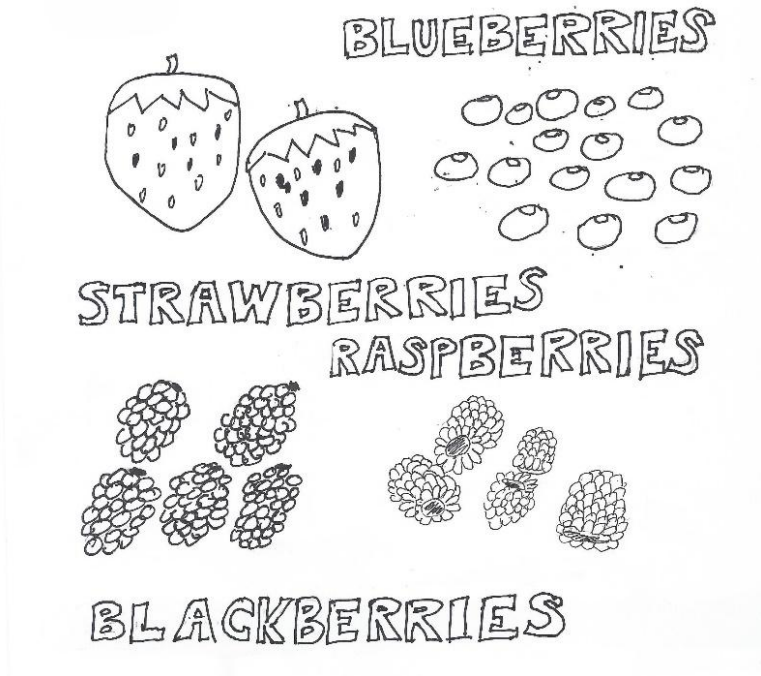
Padma Sherni then went to the wishing well to get more water for her garden. As she filled her pail of water, she wished for more friends to play with and for her garden to grow. Just then, a fairy stopped by and offered her magic sprinkles. "Don't worry, you will have good company soon! The magic sprinkles will be for your garden to help the flowers and vegetables grow. Then you can sell your items in the neighborhood."



The fairy told Padma Sherni that she must share or sell the flowers and vegetables if she used the magic sprinkles but not keep them only for herself. If she shared, she would have good luck. Otherwise, she might have to start all over.

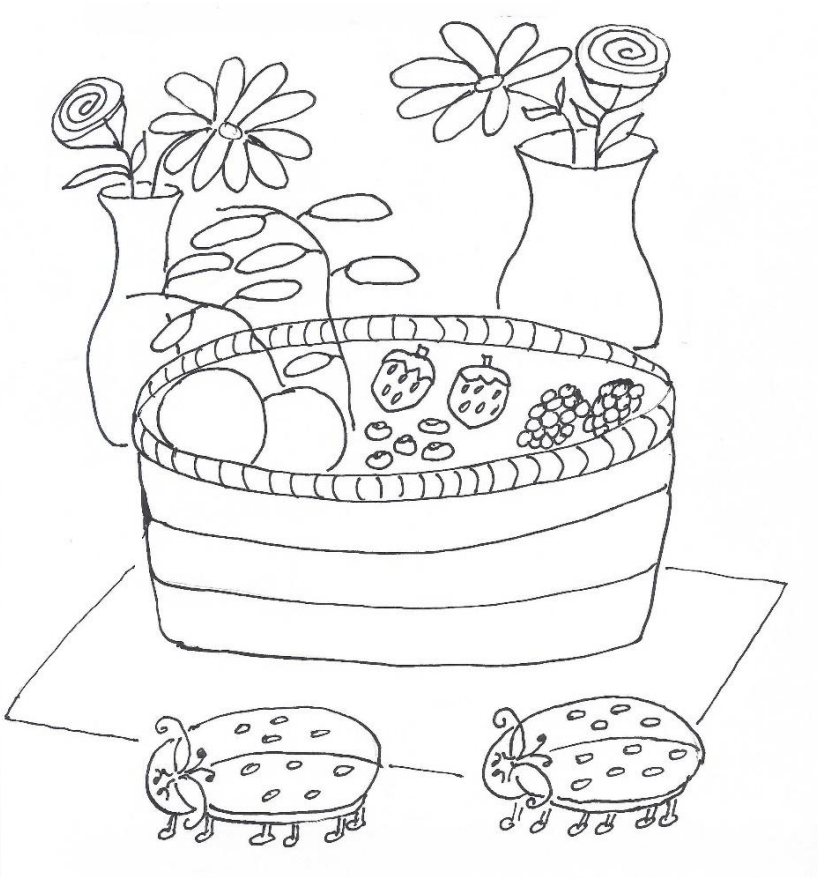
The magic sprinkles worked so well on her flower garden that Padma Sherni started to get excited and brag to some of the children in the neighborhood. The children: Betty, Luke, Jenny, and Surya, were excited too, until Padma Sherni started to decorate her playhouse with her flowers and did not share any.

The flowers began to wilt and fall apart, and the children started to go away. Padma Sherni realized her mistake and asked the children if she shared her magic sprinkles; could they help her grow her garden and share more wisely? The children were curious. "Can we each choose a fruit and grow a garden with you, sharing the magic sprinkles carefully together?" "Yes!" said Padma Sherni. "I would be so thankful for your good company and the help!" she said. Betty wanted to make strawberries, Luke wanted to make raspberries, Jenny wanted to make blackberries, and Surya wanted to make blueberries.

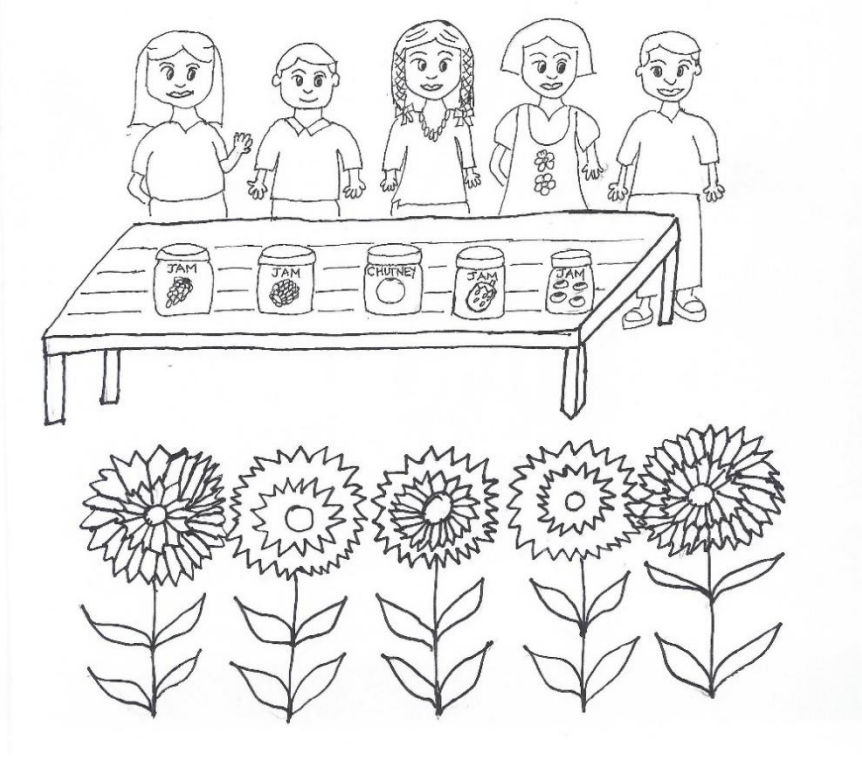


The children worked together very patiently every day and noticed the fruit and vegetable garden flourished, and the flowers started to heal and grow again, too. Padma Sherni and the children were so happy with their good efforts. The fairy was very pleased. She wished the children good luck and good ideas because they would be friends for a long time and were going to make the neighborhood happy by selling their items.

Betty, Luke, Jenny, and Surya helped Padma Sherni collect the fruit and vegetables in baskets and set up a food stand near the playful area garden house. They earned enough money from the neighbors to buy vases and began to sell the flowers, too.



They also bought some jars and asked their parents to help them make jam and chutney. The children worked patiently together with their parents with a recipe from Betty's mom. The neighbors were delighted that the children gifted them jam and chutney. The children were happy to see their garden efforts create a happy friendship, making the people around them smile proudly.



Appendix D

Activity Book Pages

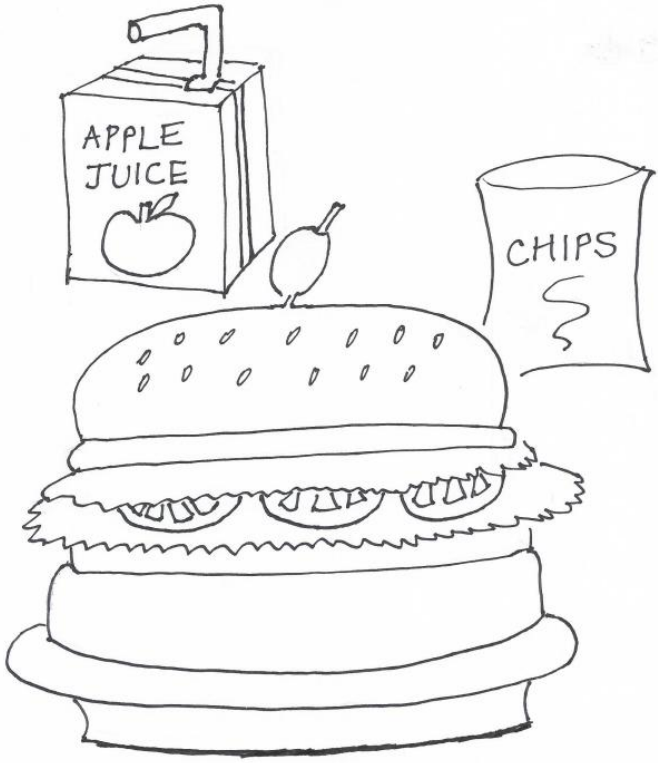
Who is Padma Sherni?

Padma Sherni is a character that was born in the United States of America. Her name translates to: Lotus Tigress. She loves to travel to different countries and learn about people and places. Padma Sherni also likes a variety of adventures and activities. She has a group of friends, both boys and girls, that she solves interesting mysteries with. In her spare time, she enjoys coloring, word searches, reading fairy tales and short stories. Look for Padma Sherni mystery books and activity books to share in the fun!

How many words can you make from the letters in "vanilla birthday cake"?

example: late _____ _____ _____

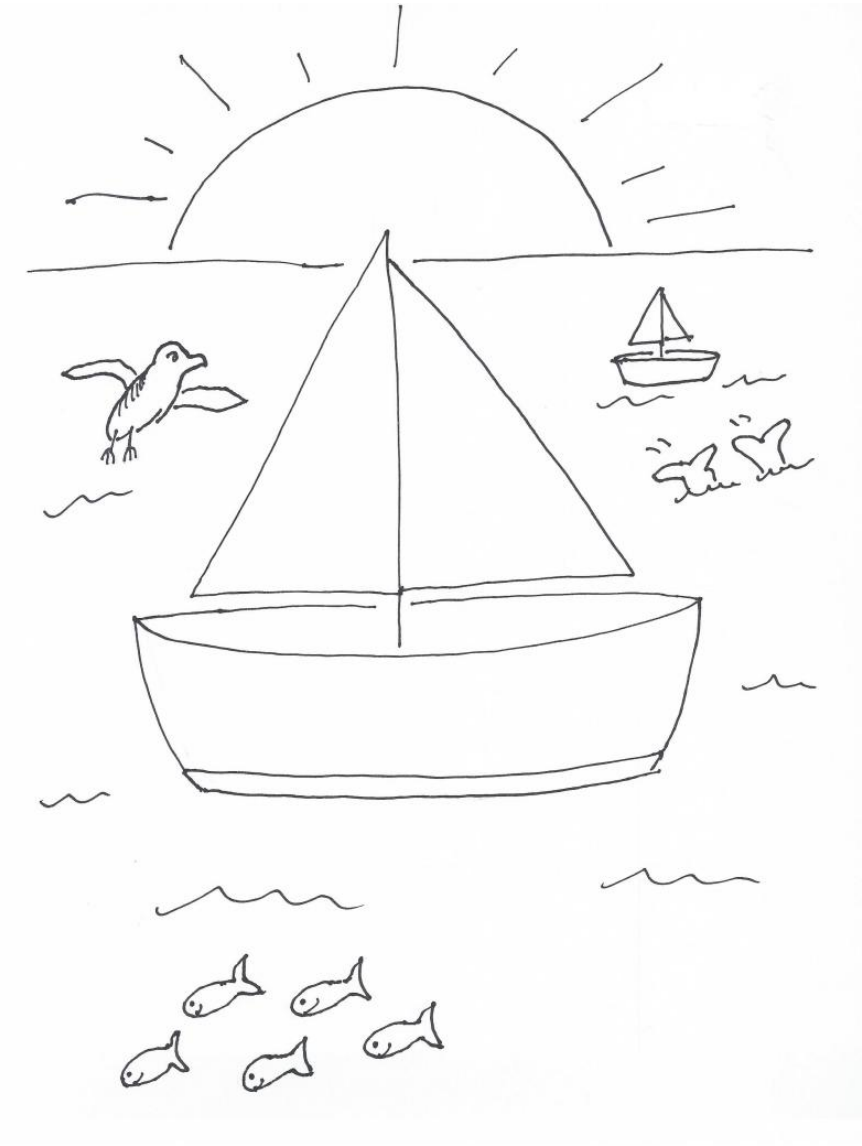
_____ _____ _____

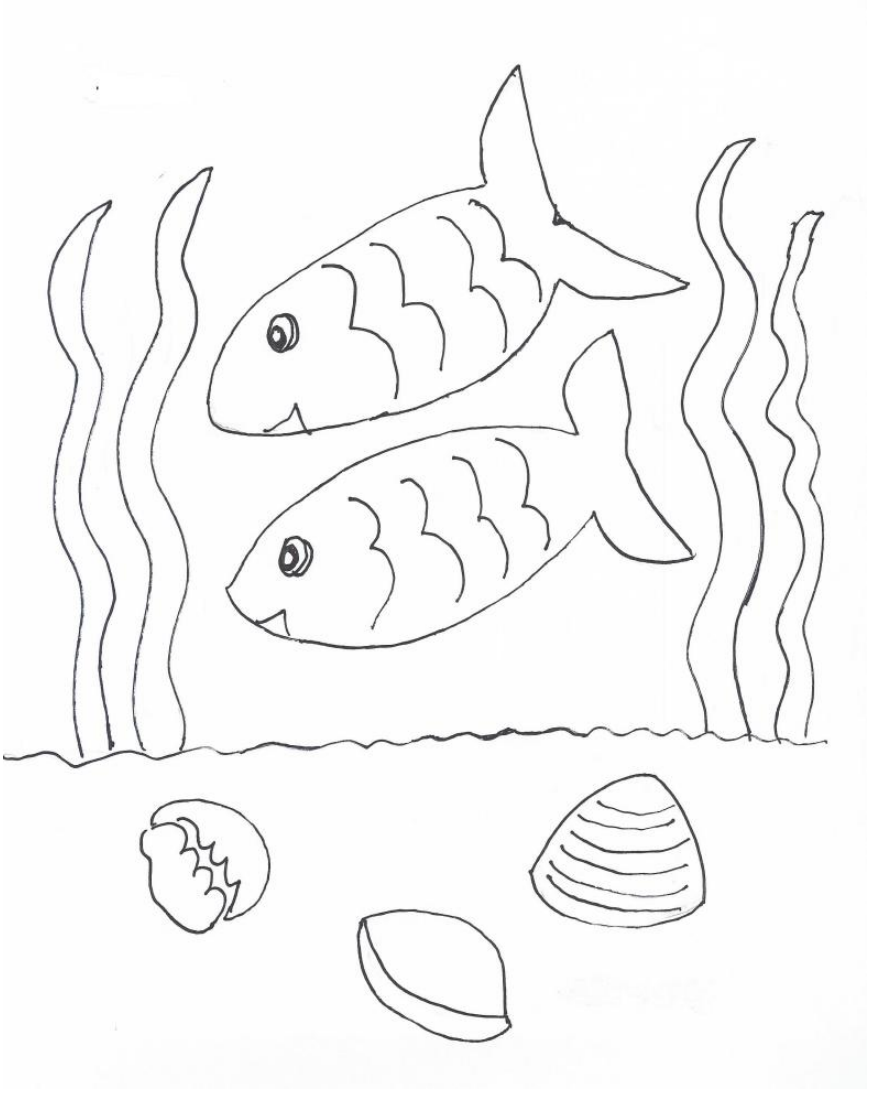


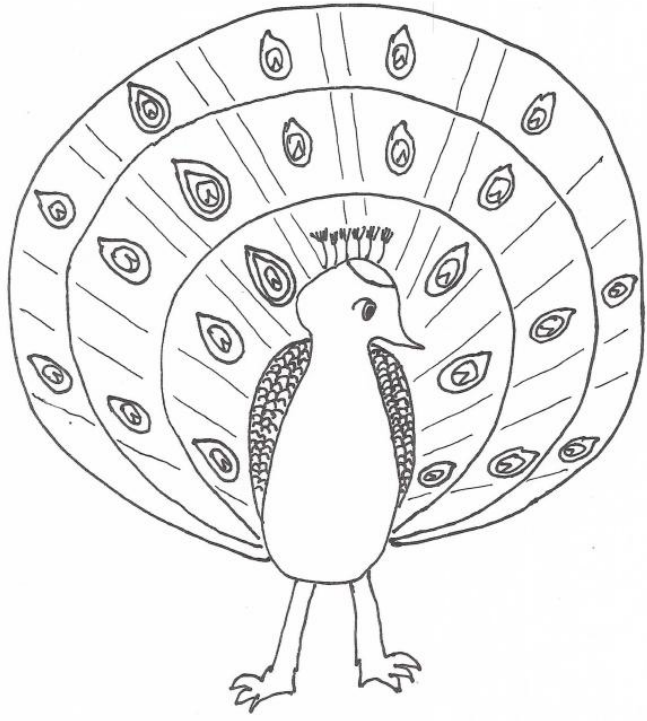
How many words can you make from the letters in "ham and cheese sandwich"?

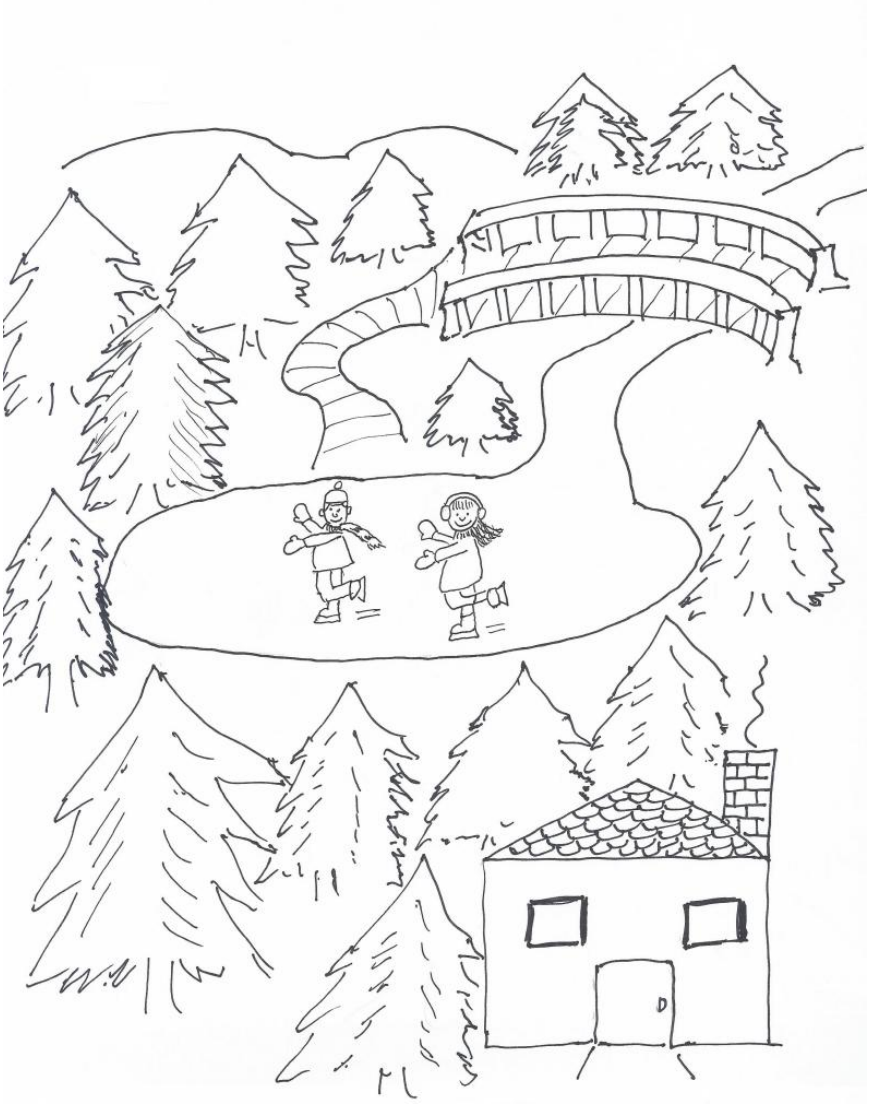
example: chin _____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____







Which feather is different?

Answer: the third feather column from the left has an extra circle ring