



Slices of Life



Jagmit Singh

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I dedicate this book to my grandfather (Bauji) S. Indar Singh jee, and my parents S. Pritam Singh jee and Mrs. Vidushi Pritam Singh. Though they are no more physically with us, their blessings will always be with me. I am what I am all because of them and I am sure they would be proud that I wrote a book.

I would like to thank my immediate family, Preeti, my wife, Arshiya my daughter and Naunidh my son in law and my sisters Jasleen and Manjula for their support and encouragement. A special mention to my cousin Puneet for motivating me.

My thanks also to my close friends from college (SRCC, New Delhi) Denzil and Chandan.

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Most of all my thanks and gratitude to Almighty God as everything is possible only with His grace and blessings.

Foreword



I must have met Jagmit sometime in 2004, when I moved to live in Gurgaon and went to Saket DDA sports complex, some sixteen

kilometers away, to play table tennis. Every Sunday. And sometimes on Saturday morning before going to office in Safdarjung Enclave which must have been seven kilometers. Those were the days when my wife used to say I was married more to table tennis than to her. There might have been something to it. Before I moved to Gurgaon, I lived in Green Park Extension and went every Sunday with Bunty to the DDA sports complex near GTB Hospital in Ghaziabad to play table tennis, and that was twenty-seven kilometers away. It took more than an hour to get there even. I was away, needless to say, for most of the day, and when I got back home, I'd find that in the pecking order of life, the wife came below table tennis, work, jazz downloads, alcohol. It is not that it would have been difficult to find a table to play nearer where I lived around

Gurgaon. It is just that it is not easy find people like Jagmit, Bunty, R K Sharma, Dr Sagar, Salil, Vikram, or Sujoy, to play table tennis with. I don't play a competitive game, it was recreational. Jagmit, I found, put up an impregnable wall of defence most days, and no matter how swiftly I sent the Nitaku premium ball cracking, Jagmit would send it back, and wait for me to tire or make mistakes, smiling his angelic smiles with his missing teeth and hugging me fiercely after the game. He is a fierce hugger.

I never asked him about his teeth and how and where he had lost them. That would have been too personal. I never asked him how he played so well either. We lived in the moment, in that bubble, and the only thing that mattered was how you spurred the ball to the other side. Many times, that moment lasted from seven in the morning till three in the afternoon when even the sun had begun to tire, and as the day wore on, we would grow younger and younger, drinking tea and eating pakoras between games, and squabble like children over every point. It is only now when I read the manuscript of poetry prose that Jagmit sent me, that I came to know how he lost so many teeth and in one go, and I also learnt how he came to have this defensive game: his formative racket was Double Happiness, which table tennis lovers will immediately understand as a valid underpinning for defence. Nor did I know that Jagmit was briefly under the tutelage of Thangavelu Thiruvengadam, a national player

with a defensive bent of game. Nor that he is an inveterate sportsman, be it squash, badminton but not swimming, especially not swimming. You will have to read this book to find out why. I wish he had kept the prose portion a little longer but if wishes were BMW X1 third hand, I'd be driving one.

Jagmit discovered the joys of writing much later in life. Here, he exhibits a light touch, sometimes tender, sometimes rueful, reflective, sometimes mischievous, sweetly nostalgic, when he writes of days where.. Na TV Tha, Na AC/Panee to nal se hee bharte the/Bahut Acheche the who din", but always positive. As he says perhaps his blood group has something to do with it. Not many aspects of life escape his ruminative scrutiny, starting from his grandfather, working his way down to his mother, his father with the beautiful handwriting, his wife, daughter, spilling arresting images along the way. I'd almost forgotten what a hold-all was till Jagmit reminded me of one that looked like a "fat Punjab Police cop." I wonder if I could have ever gone for a five to six am slot in Nanak Pura to play table tennis, especially in Delhi winters. But I now know that if I had met Jagmit back in the day and he asked me to I would. Without hesitation.

V Sudarshan

He is a renowned journalist and has worked in various publications. Indian Express, Pioneer, Outlook, New Indian Express and The Hindu. He has authored the

following, Anatomy of an Abduction, Adrift, Dead-end, Tuticorin. He likes Jazz, Table-tennis and Alcohol, though not necessarily in that order! Recently he has discovered Crime writing and Crime fiction.

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PROSE

Myself

I am going to write about myself, it's a subject I know about personally and since I've already experienced more than 64 years on this beautiful planet, I would like to share my thoughts and experiences and perhaps the readers might appreciate some part of what I've written and maybe benefit in some way.

I'm a simple person and blessed to be born as the third child of my parents into a Sikh family in the spring of 1959. My name is Jagmit Singh which in my language means world friend. I was a shy and a little plump child, fair in looks and since I had long hair and looked different from others, other children would make fun of me. Of course, I didn't like it but there wasn't much I could do about it.



I was a below average student and studied in a school run by Christian Missionary school till the Fourth class. Since we were four of us children at home, my eldest brother five years older than me and my two sisters one two years elder and the other two years younger, we were never lonely and used to play and fight all the time.

My parents were the best persons I could have asked for. When I was 7 or 8 years old my father got transferred to Kathmandu, Nepal for a three-year posting and all of us relocated except my elder brother who was in a senior class and my parents felt shifting moving him might affect his education.

In a way those three plus years were a golden period in my life. The education standard was not so high and very soon I started becoming a topper in my class. Since my brother was not around, I was more carefree as he used to bully me at times. I was quite independent too and used to move around freely on a bicycle, going to school as well as meeting my friends. Till this time, I was more or

less an ordinary happy child who hadn't committed many sins except for a few occasions of stealing some money so as to be able to fly kites on my own as my brother didn't allow me and also stealing some stamps from my grandfather's spectacle case.

Both these incidents were found out and I felt very bad and miserable after that.

Another thing I did in my school in Kathmandu was to steal a lot of stamps from the principals room. One day, since I felt the pressure of being a topper I also tried to cheat at an exam. We moved back to India and I joined a school mid-session and it was very difficult for me to adjust to the higher standards of education in Delhi. I started picking up and then was very upset as my parents put me into a more reputed school where I did not want to go.

In this new school there was not much discipline and so I never applied myself and got poor marks in my final school board exams which left me very unhappy and I started blaming my parents for it, that they changed my school so many times.

I joined a college, a prestigious college as even though I had not done as well as I should have, I still had a first division. The college years were traumatic. I initially wished to redeem myself by excelling to make up for what I considered poor marks in school. Whatever be the reason, I fared miserably in college and for the first time in my life I failed. This affected my self-esteem so much; I went into a depression and avoided meeting people. Amongst my family and friends, no one had failed. I started blaming my college, that the lecturers were not good and all of us who took up economics honours were first

divisioners however most of us after the first year of college ended up as third divisioners.

During this time of increased freedom, I took to certain bad habits. At home due to my age there was not much that my parents could do to discipline me. They were very sweet anyway and tolerated my every kind of behaviour.

Those years made a very big impact on my life. My peers and friends moved on in life achieving excellence at academics, became doctors, engineers and chartered accountants while I was at a standstill. Many avenues were blocked for me. I was unemployed for a long time and my parents were very worried about my future. Finally, I got a job! My general knowledge was good and that helped. It was not an officers' job, but it was with a reputed Airlines. Three years after my job I got

married. After a further three-year period we had a child. Today I'm a retired person. As I look back on my past, I feel a big sense of gratitude. I now am a firm believer in the Almighty. By the grace of God today I have everything, a home, my wife, a beautiful daughter and a nice son in law. We have more than enough for our needs. Two adorable grandsons who are twins. There was a time I used to think, what will become of me, I don't have a job, who will marry me, all friends and peers are doing so much better than me. Now however since I started believing in God, and I have realized my mistakes and

feel sorry for all my wrong acts and ask for forgiveness from God, I am quite content. I look around me and see beauty everywhere! I am able to forgive myself for my mistakes and move forward in life as also I am able to forgive others who in my perception have not been good or done right to me. The reason is simple, I'm not perfect myself so I have no right to judge others. I find that I get great solace in adhering to what my religion teaches me. It says remember God always, thank Him for everything, do not be too attached to anybody or with worldly things like wealth, family etc, we are just like guests here and the only thing which we can take back with us are our good acts and deeds and God's name. It is best to try and control your mind and overcome the 5 deadly demons like kaam, krodh, lobh, Moh and ahankar or Lust, Anger, Greed, Attachment and pride or ego.

If we can do that, we will be in a permanent phase of Anand or bliss. That is what God wants us to be. To be happy.

Thus, to sum up I would say, Life is quite short, enjoy the moments, in everyone's life there will be both joys and sorrows, pain and happiness. Be Equanimical and know that no time is permanent. This too shall pass, have faith in God and try to do the right thing. Be nice to people, keep your word, look after your body and mind.

Don't give anyone the power to affect your happiness or to try and control you.

Look at the positive side of things, there is always so much to be grateful for.

Mama

If there is an inspiring story about women to be told, the person who comes to mind is my mother - Mrs Vidushi Pritam Singh. Sadly, she is no more with us; she passed away a few years ago at the age of 82.



She was the daughter of a respected civil engineer who was a senior government officer. She had a happy childhood and was fond of music, painting and dance, though not very studious! The youngest in her family, she'd lived a comfortable life - with bearers serving dinner with fancily arranged cloth napkins.

She was an extremely talented artist though didn't pursue it after getting married. There is an interesting anecdote of her childhood. One day she told her mother, please buy me a garland. When her mother questioned why, she said, today the result is being declared and if I pass, I will garland my teacher. What if you fail, her mother asked "then I will put it on myself!"

When she came back from school, she was wearing the garland! She was jovial, as can be seen from the above instance!!, and used to fondly relate this incident to us and later to her grandchildren too!

As was the custom then, she was married when she was 20. Her husband, Mr Pritam Singh, was exceptionally bright and had joined the same office as her father. By the age of 28, she had four children.



When she got married, she moved into her husband's house which was a totally different environment from where she lived previously. There were no servants. It was a small flat full of a lot of people. Partition had happened and a lot of people were accommodated as they had no other place to stay. Here there was no dining table, leave aside napkins!

She toiled hard, with a smiling face, and got along well with her parents- in-law, brother-in-law and family. Though I never met my grandmother, as she expired before I was born, my mother always used to praise her a lot. She was known as Bhabijee.

My mother raised the four of us and instilled good values in us. You can well imagine how much hardship she had to undergo looking after her husband and a large family.

As my father rose in his service, my mother started getting more comforts, like the help of a servant and a car at her disposal.

We used to live in government flats, and my mother being very sociable and the only lady in the neighbourhood who knew how to drive a car, would always ask the other ladies when she had to go shopping. They would happily accompany her and do their shopping too! That's the kind of person she was, helpful and generous.

Strong, confident and determined, she was brave and always cheerful. She was a do

gooder and loved sharing helpful information. Unfortunately, she expected the same from others, to give selflessly, which often didn't happen.

Her optimism and positive attitude opened doors, made her always try. An example being, parking spots emerged for her even though my father said "you will not find parking! ".

She really didn't care what others would think of her, In those days there were very few cars on the road and hardly any women drivers. I remember she used to visit her grandmother, who was living in Gandhi Colony (across the Yamuna), whereas we used to live in South Delhi so it was a fair distance away, and once we entered the colony young children would see her driving and get excited by the sight of a woman driver! They used to chase our car.

My father was posted to Kathmandu in the year 1966 or so, and he bought a second-hand white Mercedes car, which of course my mother would drive too. It so happened, once there was a car rally going on, and there were crowds along the road, my mother had stepped out in the car, and people cheered her too! Thinking she is a contestant!

There are so many examples of her goodness, she had gone to visit my sister in USA, and per chance came to know that a school friend of mine was getting married in the Gurdwara, she volunteered to help and made langar (food)

for the wedding party! She used to cook for my sister while in America.

She loved distributing her jams and acharas to friends and relatives who she knew enjoyed them.

That's the kind of person she was, happy, sociable, helpful and an optimist. Reality of Words Publication

She always saw the positive side in everything and was very God fearing. I remember vividly she would do the evening prayer „ Rahras saab“ even though she was driving or anywhere, and we would listen in silence. Over the years this led to us also being able to remember the prayer.

She loved helping people and accompanied many of our relatives to visit their loved ones who were hospitalised. She was friendly and approachable. I have not seen her declining anybody for help when approached, if she could, she would help. In any case she lent a sympathetic ear.

She was enterprising too, once I remember she tried her hand at business along with her friend! They used to make frocks and sell to the retailers, unfortunately that venture did not prove to be successful.

She was good at knitting and embroidery and stitched cardigans for her husband and children. She had joined cooking classes and made the most delicious chutneys, pickles and other delectable culinary delights! She was adept at baking and turned-out delicious desserts.

She passed through many hurdles in her life. My father wasn't well and she managed everything by herself. In the early seventies my father was posted out of Delhi as he was chief engineer of a project in Himachal Pradesh. She single handedly got our house constructed during those difficult years, besides managing the house and school going children.

I will describe an instance of her courage during this period. The time the house was being built, everything was strictly rationed and one needed permits for everything. Cement was especially scarce. One night, middle of the night actually, it may have been 3 am, I was sleeping on the first floor of the annexe, (two small living units had been constructed on top of two garages) where we used to stay, the first floor was where I slept, and my two sisters and mother slept on the second floor. The main house was being constructed while we stayed on the site. This is the year 1970 and the place is Vasant Vihar, New Delhi. That time Vasant Vihar was just like a jungle. So suddenly I got up at about 3 am and there was a burly six-foot man and he asked where is your mother. I got scared, thinking how did he get in, then discovered later that he had come in through the window. I just said upstairs and promptly locked the door as he went out! A very cowardly act! then I heard sounds and he had rapped on the second floor flat. My mother hearing the sounds got up and asked..who is it!.. And the man, who was drunk got some sense

into him, he was an employee (chowkidar) of a neighbouring house and wanted cement bags. Since he was drunk, he committed this act. He came to his sense when my mother spoke to him in a stern voice. And he realised his mistake!

She was always very supportive. I remember I had failed in college and was very depressed. She used to cheer me and say, don't worry! Failures are the pillars of success!

Later in life she enjoyed playing bridge. She was extremely loyal and never forgot the good acts which others had done to her, she would visit elderly relatives and friends even if she was herself unwell at times.

She also always followed her routine, walking, doing path(prayers), supervision of vegetables, groceries, sorting and packing woollen clothes etc. Due to her friendly and helpful nature, she bonded well with relatives from my father's side of the family and my father, who was quite an introvert, also got close to them.

Wisdom in her proverbs. A stitch in time saves nine, Hath pair hilana painda, you have to make - make an effort. In her room she had stuck up a poster. Never, never give up!

She never let any of us feel less loved, even though at times we felt she favoured her first born.

She was very fair to her children and as per her will, she gave us children equally. For her children she would do anything! She was one

of the most hospitable persons I have known. Whenever I would visit her, she would tell me, please have some snacks, help yourself from the fridge. This was even when she herself was lying down in the bed.

Towards the end, she suffered too, she had been afflicted by dengue at the age of about 80 and needed to be hospitalised and from that she never recovered fully. She also got Parkinson's disease and suffered from diabetes and high blood pressure.

Towards the end she had to be hospitalised and had to undergo a major surgery, this took its toll.

To sum up I will say this, all mothers are nice, my mother was exceptionally nice and for us, she would do anything. Her presence was a source of strength for all of us.

Dear Mama, words are inept to describe you...I am sure you are smiling down at us. From Heaven.

I will end by writing a few lines of a poem I had written.

My Mother comes to mind.
Busy she was.
With household chores...
Or just being nice...
To friends and relatives...
And playing bridge
Added to her joy
She loved taking care

Of her children husband and friends
She had so much joy in her heart
That she's left some of that in us
At the expense of her health...
She still wanted to take us out for lunch...

Pitaji

Dear Pitaji,

This is a letter to you. And about you.

You are not in this world today. But you will always live in my heart.

I know you are with Got. And since everything is possible with God.

Who knows. Perhaps you might read it!

It is a small write up, about you.

Appended below:

“My Father Sardar Pritam Singh jee!

He was very honest, intelligent, and humble, he didn't speak much, he was a topper

throughout school and college. He was good at all the subjects, and in Engineering,

he broke the record. His name and photograph were published in the newspaper!

He is my hero; he had a beautiful handwriting! He was very loving, he used to take a

lot of interest in all his children's school books which he used to cover so well.

He looked after his clothes very well, his almirah was always so neat. The way he

folded his shirts it seemed as if they had just been ironed.

He was very handsome and was a good swimmer.

I remember my parents used to take us for walks within the colony and he would

point out the stars and show us the constellations.

He was very patient, and in my childhood. I remember getting terrible ear aches.

And I used to scream in pain. And he would take me to the dispensary, the

person on duty would sort out the issue. By flushing out the wax in my ears,

syringing them with water. It was not nice. But it solved the problem. All this would normally happen late at night!

He loved me a lot. He played badminton with me and I enjoyed playing with him!

So many fond memories of him! Once he told me "Don't do anything. Which you

would be ashamed to tell me! "Actually, I did a lot which I would be ashamed to tell!

He told me, when he had gone to USA on scholarship. He was a bachelor at the

time. He told me. He had all the freedom and the opportunity to do anything.

However, his thought was, „I wanted my wife to be a virgin, how could I not be pure myself. “

I used to love it. When I had done well and got a good report. I used to snuggle by him in bed. And we used to go through the report. How proud I used to feel! He used to teach us by example. He never used to spend on himself. He wasn't fond of shopping for himself! He used to say. Waste now. Want not.

He was very wise and due to his wise investments and guidance that all of us children are living comfortably!