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Shirin Subhani and Shahana Dattagupta were inspired to become "curators" of stories of courageous creativity after experiencing firsthand, the transformative power of creative thinking and expression that involve emotional risk and personal vulnerability. For more about Shirin and Shahana, please visit the "About Us" page on Flying Chickadee's Web site: www.flyingchickadee.com/about.html
Have you ever enjoyed looking at optical illusions? The challenge of trying to identify the multiple ways in which an image could be interpreted has always been fascinating to me. As a child, one of my favorite games was to stare at the blue sky, and try to find all the endless possibilities with the shapes of the white clouds.

Fall is a natural time to strip things to their essence and contemplate new ways of seeing. Courageous Creativity's Fall Issue offers just such a collection of stories, in which our contributors share how, through their courage and creative outlooks, they were able to find different ways of seeing things. In our featured article, "Sample of One," Neetu Rajpal writes about alternative ways of family life and parenting. In "When I was shown the door," Devasmita Chakraverty shares how, after considerable struggle, she was able to convert a lost job - a closed door - into an opportunity to open new ones. In "Here the Margins are Vast," Amber Vora reflects on how she was able to discover peace and insight in the slowness of third-world life.

Our poetry contributor Saryu Parikh offers glimpses of the new even in the depression of a domestic violence survivor. Our young contributor Mallika Wagle shows us how she refused to see her childhood age as a hurdle to thinking big and taking creative action. Artist Jeremy Week sees, through his camera lens, a lone aspen as a beacon to a forbidding forest. Finally, through our interview with the creator of Wordsmith.org, we meet Anu Garg, who sees words as playthings, making them fun and accessible to one million readers worldwide.

We hope you enjoy this issue, and that it inspires you to find creative ways of seeing situations and experiences in your life!

Shirin.

"AS A CHILD, ONE OF MY FAVORITE GAMES WAS TO STARE AT THE BLUE SKY, AND TRY TO FIND ALL THE ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES WITH THE SHAPES OF THE WHITE CLOUDS."
“THE REAL MESSAGE [IN THE CONCEPT OF CREATIVITY] IS THAT WE ALL CREATE AND SHAPE THE REALITIES OF OUR OWN LIVES TO AN EXTRAORDINARY EXTENT ... ALL OF THE PEOPLE I'VE PROFILED IN THIS BOOK HAVE ... MASTERED A COMBINATION OF ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR THAT LEAD THEM TO OPPORTUNITIES AND THAT GIVE THEM THE CONFIDENCE TO TAKE THEM. ONE OF THESE IS THE ABILITY TO LOOK AT SITUATIONS IN DIFFERENT WAYS.”

- Ken Robinson, in his book The Element, 2009

"A SIMPLE WAY TO PRACTICE 'IT'S ALL INVENTED' IS TO ASK YOURSELF THIS QUESTION:
WHAT ASSUMPTION AM I MAKING, 
THAT I'M NOT AWARE I'M MAKING, 
THAT GIVES ME WHAT I SEE?
AND WHEN YOU HAVE AN ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION, ASK YOURSELF THIS ONE:
WHAT MIGHT I NOW INVENT, 
THAT I HAVEN'T YET INVENTED, 
THAT WOULD GIVE ME OTHER CHOICES?"

- Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander, in their book The Art of Possibility, 2002

...ON COURAGEOUS CREATIVITY.
“ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STRUGGLE OVER UNEMPLOYMENT WAS THE DISCOVERY THAT I CAN BE AN ARTIST WHO CAN SEE EVERYTHING I'VE BUILT CRUMBLE, AND USE MY CREATIVITY TO REBUILD MY LIFE AFRESH FROM THE RUBBLE.”

WHEN I WAS SHOWN THE DOOR  DEVASMITA CHAKRAVERTY

Devasmita can be found staring at Google Maps and planning virtual trips most of the time. When not doing this, she is working toward a PhD in Science Education at the University of Virginia. She is experimenting with (and surviving) a major shift in career focus from toxicology to learning to design better educational practices. She draws her inspiration from humor and creativity, and loves experimenting with new interests. Traveling and performing in Seattle's Yoni Ki Baat, a South Asian adaptation of Vagina Monologues, have greatly influenced the way she perceives life. She aspires to visit all the continents and every U.S. national park (and write about them) someday.
On January 1st, 2010 I stood in the cold and rain, watching the fireworks explode over the Space Needle, squished in a merrymaking crowd at a Seattle pub. The clock struck twelve, and I welcomed the New Year with unemployment. No more playing office every morning. No more pay checks for an indefinite period of time. Unemployed and visa-less, barely a year out of graduate school and single, I cried broken-heartedly for all the catharsis in my life.

Do you know the one big thing that losing a job can do to you? No, it does not drive you bankrupt instantly; your savings see you through. No, it doesn't make you friendless; if anything, friends, "long-lost" friends, and "not-so-friendly" friends shower (and sometimes smother) you with their love, support, and sympathy. No, it does not immediately strip you off your visa-status; there are ways to buy yourself some time. But yes, it does strip you off your confidence – big time. It eats into your self-esteem, leaving a dull void of self-doubt at the core. You hide and sulk, stop taking calls, eat rubbish, put on weight, look at your degrees with doubt, peruse your graduation album and cry, get into the mode of overanalyzing things, and question your abilities. The voices in your head keep nagging, "Maybe you weren't good enough."

I tried for months to get another job, but nothing worked out. One sunny morning, tired of feeling sorry, I asked myself what I would do if I didn't have to worry about money, success, or what others thought of me. I started to make a list of the things I would do if I just took a break. I was healthy, enthusiastic, unattached to either a partner or employer and didn't have a child to look after or a mortgage to pay, and could live in whatever part of the world I chose to. I wondered how I had overlooked these blessings. As I kept writing, my "wish list" kept growing. There were so many things I had always wanted to do! Go back to school for a different subject. Travel Europe. Visit family. Learn a new skill. Lose weight. Watch all the top movies on the IMDB list. Write a book.

“DO YOU KNOW THE ONE BIG THING THAT LOSING A JOB CAN DO TO YOU? ... THE VOICES IN YOUR HEAD KEEP NAGGING, “MAYBE YOU WEREN'T GOOD ENOUGH.”
By the end of January I found myself sitting in music class, dusting the cobwebs off my voice and relearning my Sa-Re-Ga-Ma. (As a kid I used to sing with my grandfather.) I had always wanted to dance too, but felt self-conscious; I had gained a lot of weight in the last few years. But soon, the weekends saw me dancing to Bollywood tunes, and in February I performed on stage with a local dance troupe!

I gave up my apartment and started living with a close friend, helping her take care of her baby. Baby and I became best friends, and I learnt how to feed a one-and-a-half-year-old, keep her entertained, teach her new words, and sing to her. By the end of my month-long stay with her, she was singing Sa-Re-Ga-Ma with complete confidence. Then I moved to another friend's place while she traveled, where I had another baby to care for – a very understanding and communicative cat. Everyone knows I am terrified of animals! But I saw this as another opportunity to get over my fears and take temporary responsibility for another living being. Soon Kitty and I sat together in the evenings watching television or playing. I told her stories and she responded by purring and meowing. We even watched a Bengali movie together!

By the end of March, I heard back that I was not granted an extension to my US visa. I was expected to leave the country, my home for the last four years, within a week. I opened Google maps and asked myself: If the world is a playground lying invitingly in front of me, where would I like to play next? I had my answer. I sold most of my stuff, stowed the rest in boxes in a friend's garage, left my car in another friend's driveway, and took off. I took a flight to New York, and another flight that didn't stop till it reached India. There I rejuvenated myself for a bit, feeling nurtured with the unadulterated love and support that my family provided after four long years of separation, and then went back to work. I started teaching, as a volunteer, in the school I used to teach in four years ago.

"ONE SUNNY MORNING, TIRED OF FEELING SORRY, I ASKED MYSELF WHAT I WOULD DO IF I DIDN'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT MONEY, SUCCESS, OR WHAT OTHERS THOUGHT OF ME."

WHEN I WAS SHOWN THE DOOR - DEVASMITA CHAKRAVERTY
After three-and-a-half months in India, it was time to move on. I had always wanted to walk the streets of Vienna where my favorite movie "Before Sunrise" was shot, and I did. I had always wanted to visit an active volcano, and there I was, climbing Mount Etna in Sicily. I strolled the streets of Dresden, licked Gelato in Rome, marveled at the awe-inspiring work of Michelangelo, stood mesmerized by the beauty of Salzburg, visited the castles of Prague, walked inside the world's largest ice caves in Werfen, and hiked in the Alps. Map in hand and an indomitable wanderlust, my dreams of backpacking Europe had come true.

The best experiences had been spread out for me as a buffet, and in eight months I had got a taste of almost everything I had desired. These eight months had also gifted me the realization that I never wanted to work as a toxicologist again. When I returned to the US to take on the unfinished dream of a PhD, it was not to study cells, molecules and protein structures, but to learn more about how people learned about these things. I was blessed to have admissions in half-a-dozen Departments of Education in various parts of the U.S. I chose to convert my passion for teaching to the pursuit of research in Science Education.

On the other side of the struggle over unemployment was the discovery that I can be an artist who can see everything I've built crumble, and use my creativity to rebuild my life afresh from the rubble. I have learned how to significantly detach from expectations and outcomes to work on creating new opportunities. I still have occasional nightmares of being told to leave my workplace, but ultimately, I feel unfettered, free of baggage and the thoughts of how the world perceives me, and secure in the knowledge that I have taken good care of myself through these months, and have not failed myself.

When I was shown the door, it had marked the end of things as I had known them. But that very door marked the beginning of so many new things on the other side.

"I STILL HAVE OCCASIONAL NIGHTMARES OF BEING TOLD TO LEAVE MY WORKPLACE, BUT ULTIMATELY, I FEEL UNFETTERED, FREE OF BAGGAGE AND THE THOUGHTS OF HOW THE WORLD PERCEIVES ME..."
"I HOPE AND PRAY A SPARK OF JOY MAY IGNITE THE DIM INTERNAL LIGHT."

DEPRESSION  SARYU PARIKH

Saryu Dilip Parikh is a volunteer for the victims of domestic violence. There are several organizations across the United States, helping South Asian women in need. There are some success stories of survivors, but some cases, sadly, cannot be helped. As an extended helping-hand, Saryu feels glad to bring some light in several unhappy lives. She expresses the struggles, pain and hope she witnesses, in the form of poetry and stories. Dilip K. Parikh, Saryu's husband, often creates paintings to accompany her writings. He is a Physicist and Electronics Engineer by education and training. Saryu and Dilip live in Austin, Texas. More of their work can be seen at www.saryu.wordpress.com.
In the dark corner with ghosts
I paid a heavy depression cost;
God gave me a sweet angel
and her to you, I simply lost.

Some kind people do care,
But relation is a two-way affair;
I feel barren, dull within,
Have nothing much to share.

They say my tasks are all undone,
But I have been busy, overwhelmed;
I saw good fortune dance away
Leaned on someone else's sway.

My life is thick layers of cloud
I fall, no one here to hold;
I hope and pray a spark of joy
may ignite the dim internal light.
"WE ARE HOPEFUL THAT OUR HONEST ATTEMPT AT LIVING A CONSCIOUSLY CHOSEN LIFE WILL TEACH OUR BOYS TO APPROACH LIFE WITH OPENNESS AND CREATIVITY, IN PURSUIT OF HARMONY WITH THEMSELVES."

SAMPLE OF ONE  NEETU RAJPAL

Neetu is a pushover mommy who is always ready to go to the pool, the park, a walk or bike ride instead of cleaning up the house. She and her husband are self-proclaimed geeks who took their then five-year-old to Orlando to watch the Space Shuttle Launch from Kennedy Space Center, but skipped Disney. When not being awed by her awesome immediate and extended family, she spends her time building email security software for a living.
A few years after we were married and well before we were seriously thinking about having kids, I said to my husband "I wonder if it is better for a parent to stay home and raise the children." To my surprise, my dear hubby said, "I think if we ever have kids, one of us should stay home, and whoever is making more money should continue working." Then he added, "I wouldn't mind staying home."

Six years ago, seven into our marriage, my clock started ticking, and we had our first. When the maternity leave was over, the husband stayed home, and there began a journey I never anticipated. Juan became the stay-at-home dad, and I became the bread-winning mom. It made complete sense. We were committed to raising our kid ourselves: the thought of our kid getting full time care from and establishing a strong parent-like bond with someone other than a parent was a thought we couldn't bear. We were also fortunate enough to have a reasonable lifestyle on one income. Juan is a very warm, giving, caring and generous person, with a child-like inquisitiveness about the world. He insists on caring about the details and doing things perfectly. I made more money, and the family was financially better off with me having a career. We now have another little one, and Juan is the primary care-giver for both our kids. He is such a wonderful parent that it has all worked out just fine. To get here, however, we had to discover and accept that we do things a lot differently from almost everyone we know.

Although neither of us knew how to raise a child, the world is better suited for a mother staying home than a dad doing so. When I was still on maternity leave, I socialized with a mothers' group, a set of women who are still my best friends. Being a mother was at least partly social; there was a group of us with newborns going through the same trials and tribulations. There is an abundance of literature on experiences of new mothers. No such social or cultural support-system exists for stay-at-home dads. The term itself was still new, and I worried about how Juan would deal with the lack of social support.

"ALTHOUGH NEITHER OF US KNEW HOW TO RAISE A CHILD, THE WORLD IS BETTER SUITED FOR A MOTHER STAYING HOME THAN A DAD DOING SO."
We started with scheduling some activities for the baby and daddy to do during the week: once a week they attended class at the local baby gym. When most mommies I know join this sort of class, they make friends with other mommies, but it is not the same for men. Juan went to class and other women didn't know what to make of it; most of them assumed he was just unemployed. Only years after taking the class in multiple cities did he get invited to go to lunch with two other mommies and their kids. (I am really, really glad he did because all of us are now great friends.)

Another challenge we faced is that if I was not involved, mommies felt uncomfortable scheduling play-dates. Juan feels unclear of the social consequences of "asking" any mommy to schedule a play-date, so he avoids the issue. Play-dates just don't seem to happen with the very few stay-at-home dads we marginally know. (Luckily, though, a lack of play-dates doesn't seem to have affected our five-year-old's social growth; he is quite popular with all his friends from school, and is a natural leader in a group.)

The next thing we discovered was that while traditionally, stay-at-home mommies are usually also the house-wives, in our home, "stay-at-home dad" didn't automatically mean "house-husband"! Keeping a house going while caring for a baby is no small feat for anyone, but it was even harder for us. Nothing in Juan's traditional Dominican upbringing had prepared him for keeping a house, running laundry, getting dinner ready, etc. We struggled to keep the house livable, eat food that resembled nutrition, and schedule paying bills on time. Once, at work, I was talking about how our home is never clean, and a mom who had stayed at home when her children were young, asked, "Juan's home, right? Why doesn't he take care of it?" I found myself struggling to explain, and I couldn't. I mulled over that incident for days, and eventually felt quite upset with my co-worker's comments. Assuming that because Juan was raising our child meant that he must also take on all the other responsibilities of keeping a home was just not very thoughtful.

"WE STARTED WITH SCHEDULING SOME ACTIVITIES FOR THE BABY AND DADDY TO DO DURING THE WEEK ... JUAN WENT TO [BABY GYM] CLASS AND OTHER WOMEN DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO MAKE OF IT; MOST OF THEM ASSUMED HE WAS JUST UNEMPLOYED."
Now, years later, we have evolved a system that works, but it doesn't resemble anything most others we know do. We don't have set tasks, and don't expect either one to take care of everything at home. We prioritize keeping the kids fed, happy and clean, higher than everything else. We accept messiness in our house, but not un-cleanliness. We accept eating out once or twice a week but not more, and we pay bills as soon as they arrive.

Once, I got invited to Mommy's night out. I thought this was a great idea; I could hang out with my friends, get a meal and maybe even a movie. When I actually got there, it hit me that I wasn't quite ready for it. My friends felt it was only fair that they should get a night out with friends, while I felt undeserving and selfish. I couldn't enjoy it. The worst part of it all was that Juan had never asked for a night off. I do not know where he gets his patience and even-keel approach to almost everything, but I am thankful and grateful. Now I do not do "Mommy's night out" until I really do feel like I need some personal time. I also try to be conscious of Juan's needs, and he too has become more attentive to his needs for personal time, and takes time off once in a while.

As I progressed in my career, the demands on my time significantly increased. I do not get to spend enough time with my kids. I tried talking with some of my male colleagues, but discovered yet another difference - they did not resonate with my feelings because they considered working and providing for the family as the equivalent of being a good parent. Everything in my traditional Indian upbringing had conditioned me to believe that a woman's primary responsibility is to care for her kids and her house. I constantly question the decision that I have made instead and doubt myself often. My definition of a good mother is something I am making up as I go along, and it includes more time with my kids than I am able to provide. I continue to struggle with this, and I do not know if I will ever find resolution.

“I TRIED TALKING WITH SOME OF MY MALE COLLEAGUES, BUT DISCOVERED … THEY DID NOT RESONATE WITH MY FEELINGS BECAUSE THEY CONSIDERED WORKING AND PROVIDING FOR THE FAMILY AS THE EQUIVALENT OF BEING A GOOD PARENT.”
Yet, things have turned out unbelievably well. When we decided to have the second baby and I took maternity leave, the dreaded and bone-tiring first few months weren't spent alone by a single parent at home; they were spent with both of us at home. I got to recover physically and emotionally better than I did with the first kid. We got to enjoy the precious early moments together, the baby bonded with both of us almost equally. When it was time for me to go back to work, Juan and I were well prepared.

Physically, we are as exhausted as any other parents, yet emotionally, we have grown to feel secure. Our out-of-step lifestyle is no longer something we think about too much. Over time we have been blessed with friends who approach life as freely as we do, and are as dedicated to their kids as we are. Our previously worried parents have seen how happy and well-adjusted we all are, and are nothing but proud of us now. I even caught my mom taking pride in how Juan raises our children! We are also hopeful that our honest attempt at living a consciously chosen life will teach our boys to approach life with openness and creativity, in pursuit of harmony with themselves.

“NOW, YEARS LATER, WE HAVE EVOLVED A SYSTEM THAT WORKS, BUT IT DOESN'T RESEMBLE ANYTHING MOST OTHERS WE KNOW DO … WE PRIORITIZE KEEPING THE KIDS FED, HAPPY AND CLEAN, HIGHER THAN EVERYTHING ELSE.”
Migraine headaches are a significant burden for people who suffer from them. There is no cure. Despite the best efforts of health care providers, many migraineurs find that their ability to work and to function is still limited.

Gerry Fryer, MA, ACC is a professional coach and a migraineur who has overcome multiple barriers to achieve success in his life and work. He partners with other migraine sufferers who have decided that they want to take back control of their lives from the disease, with people who want to be able to say "I can" far more often than "I can't" in future. They work together towards the goal of creating a rejuvenated individual with a much improved quality of life.

For a free consultation with Gerry on your own behalf, or for someone you know, please see the contact information below.

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http://www.rencoach.ca/c_MigraneC.htm
http://facebook.com/migraine.independence
http://ca.linkedin.com/in/gerryfryer

Gerry Fryer is not a health care professional and strongly advises you to access the best possible medical treatment plan for your headaches.
“INSTEAD OF WAITING FOR A FUTURE OPPORTUNITY, I NEEDED TO DO SOMETHING IN THE PRESENT ... ONE THING THAT I AM SURE ABOUT NOW, THAT I WAS NOT BEFORE THIS PROJECT, IS THAT EVEN KIDS CAN DO THINGS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE!”

JEWELRY FOR HAITI  MALLIKA WAGLE

Mallika Wagle is twelve years old and a seventh grade student. She is an avid skier and table tennis player, loves math, enjoys playing the piano, and can get completely lost in books for many hours at a time.
I recently completed one of the most important projects that I have ever done. By making and selling jewelry that I created, I raised twelve hundred dollars, and donated it to Partners in Health, for earthquake victims of Haiti.

Often, people ask me how and why I did this.

Many times, my parents have taken me to different talks and shows on different parts of the world. I would learn about climate change and how it is affecting the earth, the way that people are treated badly in some parts of the world, and how peoples' lives are affected by some huge event, such as the earthquake in Haiti. Many times, I have heard people say that going to fundraisers and donating large sums of money would greatly help their cause, but these suggestions are always directed towards adults. Often, I would ask my parents what I could do to help. They usually replied that I could make sure that I studied hard in school, so that I would eventually be able to really help people once I grew up. But I wanted some way to help now! Instead of waiting for a future opportunity, I needed to do something in the present.

I decided to turn to one of my hobbies: jewelry making. I had only been doing this for a few months, so I was not very experienced. But, once I decided to pursue it seriously with a goal in mind, I gained skills quickly. I started by selling my jewelry to close friends of my family at parties, and then gradually branched out further by spreading the information through an email with a slideshow of the jewelry and my purpose, which went to most of my mother's women friends. Eventually, she asked the principal of my school if I could send an all-school email with pictures of the jewelry. I had many orders, and was soon quite busy with them. Sometimes, when making the same piece over and over again seemed monotonous, I thought of how it would help someone. So I felt good about it and completed the piece.

“OFTEN, I WOULD ASK MY PARENTS WHAT I COULD DO TO HELP. THEY USUALLY REPLIED THAT I COULD MAKE SURE THAT I STUDIED HARD IN SCHOOL, SO THAT I WOULD EVENTUALLY BE ABLE TO REALLY HELP PEOPLE ONCE I GREW UP.”
When I had completed all of the orders and sold all of my pieces for this project, I did not know how much money I had raised. One day, my mother and I counted the orders and prices, and I found out that I had made approximately twelve hundred dollars! I was elated, because it was enough to actually help. We immediately began the donation process.

Now, I am hoping to do more one-of-a-kind pieces, and sell them individually instead of via mass email. I will still donate the proceeds to charity, but it may be to a different cause. One thing that I am sure about now, that I was not before this project, is that even kids can do things to make a difference!

“... MY MOTHER AND I COUNTED THE ORDERS AND PRICES, AND I FOUND OUT THAT I HAD MADE APPROXIMATELY TWELVE HUNDRED DOLLARS!”
“I AM AFRAID I WILL NOT BE ABLE TO FIND SUCH SANCTUARY IN SMALLNESS AND SLOWNESS WHEN WE RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES, A COUNTRY WHERE OUR COLLECTIVE BLOOD RUNS TOO FAST.”

HERE THE MARGINS ARE VAST

Amber Vora was born and raised in Houston, Texas before finding home in the Pacific Northwest amidst the silver firs and noble peaks that hug Puget Sound. She is equal parts idealist and cynic, a useful if maddening mix, and loves a typical laundry list of activities: cooking, eating, reading, and writing. For nearly a decade, she worked in the movement to end violence against women. Currently she is captivated with (among other things) reimagining one’s life, identity and worth, while living with a disability. She lived in South Asia for a year and a half between 2006 and 2008.
Sitting on the roof before I meditate, a swarm of ants, their backs reflecting metallic copper in the late afternoon sun, fight over a thin sliver of something tender and pinkish green. A thousand thoughts fall, swirling about until my mind gently opens and in spills the sky. When I climb down the ladder from the roof, somehow I bump my head on a rung: a sharp, fleeting pain and tears well up in the corners of my eyes.

I like my life here, small and quiet. There is some peace in the slowness of the days, a slowness to match my body's faltering rhythms: sorting through lentils; washing the rice five times before soaking; reading a few pages of a book before pausing to stretch my stiff neck, shoulders and back; breaking up every longer activity with a handful of small tasks (making a cup of tea, picking a tiny green lemon from the modest courtyard garden).

My day happens in a hundred little fragments, shreds of torn paper falling to the cool marble floors like confetti tossed from a child's plump fist. Sometimes I marvel at how content I am... the woman I was would imagine feeling suffocated and trapped as the circles I tread in the outside world fold in upon themselves: a paper lotus blooming backwards... smaller with each passing day.

I am afraid I will not be able to find such sanctuary in smallness and slowness when we return to the United States, a country where our collective blood runs too fast. Where those who can't or won't keep up are stranded on the shores of the wireless-wired, hypersonic river of Meaning, Money and Achievement.

Here I am a known outsider; nets of judgment remain suspended over the water.

You say, there the margins are thin as paper's edge. Ah, I say, but here the margins are vast, and desolate, quiet and wonderful.

Some days I think, I have tired of this too-busy world and

I don't think I want to go home.

LAHORE, PAKISTAN, 2008
“I DON'T PLAY FAVORITE WITH WORDS. THERE ARE SO MANY WORDS. AND JUST AS THE MOST ORDINARY-LOOKING MAN ON THE STREET MAY HAVE THE MOST UNUSUAL TALES TO TELL, EVEN EVERYDAY WORDS HAVE THEIR STORIES.”

IN DIALOGUE WITH ANU GARG

Anu Garg is the founder of Wordsmith.org, a community of more than a million readers in some 200 countries, who share a love for words, wordplay, language, and literature. He has authored three bestseller books on words. He speaks about words and language in the US and other countries. It was a pleasure to chat with Anu; here are some excerpts from Shirin's interview with him.
SS: Congratulations on hitting the million mark in readership! How does it feel to know you are reaching so many people all over the world?

AG: Thanks. To me it shows the universal appeal of words. We all can relate to words no matter where we live, what we do for a living, or what we look like. I feel fortunate to be a part of such a worldwide community. I share words with readers and they share their stories with me. It completes the circle and we all learn from each other.

SS: What was it that first attracted you to words and finding out about their origin and meaning? And how did you get started on the Word-A-Day idea?

AG: I loved reading as far back as I can recall. Eventually I started wondering about where words come from and who made them up. I realized that each word has a biography - we call it etymology. All words have fascinating stories to tell, if only we take the time to hear them.

SS: Can you talk a little bit about your process? How do you decide the theme for the week and then pick the words for that theme? Also, we really like the thought of the day that accompanies the daily word. How do you find those?

AG: I'm always on the lookout for words, words that are interesting, unusual, or rare, words that are derived from someone's name, words that are borrowed from another language, words that are from a particular field, and so on. Instead of presenting random words, I weave them into themes. One week it could be words that have a specific pattern, words having all vowels, for example. Another week I might feature words that come from the field of spinning and are now used metaphorically. The quotations come from a collection I built up over the years. Going by the reader feedback those quotations are one of the most enjoyed features of the newsletter.

“I FEEL FORTUNATE TO BE A PART OF SUCH A WORLDWIDE COMMUNITY. I SHARE WORDS WITH READERS AND THEY SHARE THEIR STORIES WITH ME. IT COMPLETES THE CIRCLE ...”
SS: What are your thoughts on the evolution of language – about new words that are being formed and being added to the dictionary?

AG: A language has to evolve to reflect the times or risk being a dead language. The only languages that don't change are the ones that are considered petrified now, such as Latin or Sanskrit. Though even these languages live on through their daughter languages, French, Spanish, Italian, and others in case of Latin, and Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, etc. in case of Sanskrit. We can say that these so-called dead languages have evolved or branched out into various languages.

New words are like fresh blood in a language. With new customs, ideas, and inventions in our lives, we need words to describe them. When there's no existing word, we coin a new word to fill the gap. Sometimes we adapt a word to take up the new job. Who had heard of the job of a webmaster just 20 years ago?

SS: Can you tell us what some of your favorite words are?

AG: I don't play favorite with words. There are so many words. And just as the most ordinary-looking man on the street may have the most unusual tales to tell, even everyday words have their stories. Take the word window, for example. It comes from Old Norse and literally means "wind's eye". You open a window and wind flows in. The poetry of words is incomparable.

www.wordsmith.org is the website that delivers "A.Word.A.Day" to inboxes all over the world. It also includes "Internet Anagram Server" where you can discover the wisdom of anagrams and "Wordsmith Chat" where you can chat live with authors, lexicographers and thinkers, and more.

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“I FEEL THAT MOTION CREATES A SENSE OF TIME, GIVING AN ADDED DIMENSION TO MY IMAGES.”

ASPEN TORCH  JEREMY WEEK

Jeremy is a Colorado artist who uses photography as a medium. His emphasis is abstract nature, using camera motion to simplify subjects, reducing to color and form. One of Jeremy's images was recently juried into the Natural World exhibition at The Center for Fine Art Photography (December 2010). He has also been recognized by the Spotlight Award (2011), Best Natural Landscape (Working with Artists Members Show, 2010), and Art in Nature (The Center for Fine Art Photography, 2009).
"Aspen Torch" was created while working in the Colorado High Country this Fall. I saw a lone aspen standing against the edge of a dark forest. This stunted, yet colorful tree, felt like a beacon before entering the foreboding woods.
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