

Halfway where?



by Avtar Singh

I turned 40 this past month. As a battalion of older relatives cheerfully informed me, I'm halfway "there". "There", presumably, being my own inevitable end. The fact that this information was conveyed to me on the back of a few stellar meals and more than a few drinks served to mitigate its bite. Anyway, as I'm happy to inform those that still have this milestone to look forward to, it changes absolutely nothing.

Except for this: it makes you weigh your recollections. And what a burden they can be. Though I was born elsewhere, I came to an appreciation of my own selfhood in this city. Though I left before adulthood was thrust upon me, Delhi is still freighted with memories. Naturally, my young life was one of some geographic constraint. But such as it was, I remember it well.

The afternoon of my writing this, I stopped to fill up at a petrol pump immediately across the road from the house which I called home all those years ago. The tomb behind the petrol pump still stands. The trees in the median are taller.

But much else is different. There is now a metal cage through the median to discourage pedestrians. The house I remember was torn down and rebuilt. The traffic is of a volume that would have beggared my earlier self's imagination. There is even a Metro station.

And yet. Behind the unfamiliar house and to its sides stand the same trees I remember, a mammoth mango among them. As I stood in the shade in the petrol pump, waiting for my car to finish its drink, I considered the blue sky and its fringe of clouds and I thought in a hazy way of a man taking his life into his hands and rushing across the busy road to hitch up his trousers and hop the cage to the other side.

I thought of a child being led across a quiet yet similar road, his hand in his ayah's, an ice cream in his other hand. I thought of that man walking up a driveway up which he'd run a lifetime ago and ringing a bell and rising up the staircase to the roof where that same child waits, a smile on his face and no past to anchor him, his future a gloriously blank slate. Above them float those selfsame clouds in a sky blue with the promise of the cool weather to come. Will there be recognition, I wonder. Will there be a connection, for with the insouciance of childhood and the clarity of middle-age, surely they both know that it is they, separately and together, the thread, the link, the fulcrum, around which play the future of one and the past of the other, their family and their city. This is my city and I will inherit it, thinks the child. This is my city and I'm stuck with it, sighs the man. Under their feet is their home, a family and its shared lives and

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histories. Across the walls is a city that will be and already is in spate. Outside is the Emergency, outside is the shiny stainless steel of the Metro and the Commonwealth Games. Will they reach out to each other, will there be recognition? But how would you recognise an unmet world?

That's the thing with petrol pumps. You wait too long, you're going to get high.

That's the thing with returning to a place that's heavy with memories. I've lived a life away from this city and I've only just reconciled myself to saying I'm from here. But a chance afternoon decision, to gas up at a pump I'd never stop at otherwise, and I'm carried away on a flood that takes in, at random, the silk of my mother's sari and the dog who curled up against her feet because he loved it too; the smell of Diwali and the taste of sauerkraut in winter; the feel of my father's beard as I kissed him before leaving for school, my elder

sisters using me as a bed-warmer and, behind our home, parks in which we were actually free to play.

My own son is the same age as that child. Mine is the beard he feels against his cheek when he kisses me goodbye on his way to school. When he's 40, perhaps I'll be "there". The thought doesn't faze me. It's in the fullness of things that we are born and live and fade away. I'm sure the city he'll know will have space for his memories. And I, we, our family and lives, will be among them.

That's the thing about belonging to something, to some place, to someone. You'll be remembered. To be remembered is to make being halfway "there" weigh nothing at all.

METROPOLIS

Strange tales from our international brethren

Time Out London



Fundraising runs are rarely sillier than this. On Saturday, September 22, the participants donned hairy gorilla suits to take part in

a seven-kilometre race around London's streets to draw attention to the need to protect the dwindling number of mountain gorillas that remain in the wild, and raise funds for community projects that preserve endangered gorilla habitats.

Time Out New York



Some of the highlights from the first "Et cetera" festival in Williamsburg in September: a three-minute book story festival, in which

more than a dozen writers were called on to tell a biblio-centric tale in no longer than 180 seconds; an online video network discussion between a roboticist, a drone engineer, an ethicist and an urbanist on robots and cyborg sex followed by a drone musical performance; a talk on the "10,000 year old origins of beer"; and a unique bar brawl, in which eight costumed competitors with names like Nancy Drew Blood and Tom Bruise fought each other amid burlesque routines.

Time Out Hong Kong



Harry Potter may be all grown up now, but a two-man show relived his life from all seven books in the series in a

70-minute theatrical production titled *Potted Potter*. Actors Jesse Briton and Gary Trainor tackled the roles of all the characters. Also part of the play were a chaotic, large scale Quidditch match involving the audience, and a hip hop dance-off between Harry and Lord Voldemort.