

The Courage To Change

Award-winning columnist **Shazia Mirza** on the trials and tribulations of entering the bearpit of comedy

I am a stand up comedian. Sometimes people ask me, 'What is your real job?' This is my real job. I am not a part time brain surgeon, ophthalmist, or veterinarian who fits in a few jokes in the evenings. This is it, I'm a clown.

My parents plans for my life did not include comedy. They had it all aspirationally planned out. Science A'levels, Oxbridge, Medicine, marriage to the Prime Minister, children, mansion, so meticulously planned they would have even set a date for a heart attack and then death.

I always wanted to perform, I remember my Aunt Vicious- (we used to call her that, because if anyone of us came out with a wrong answer, a wooden stick wouldn't be far away) asking me what I wanted to be when I grew up. "I want to be on stage" I replied. I was seven. "You can't do that" she shouted.

I couldn't understand her reaction; I only wanted to be a comedian- not work at Spearmint Rhino.

Nothing is insuperable. I met Boy George at a party when I was 21, he asked me what I did, at the time I was a student but I told him I really wanted to be on stage. He said "If you want something badly enough you can have it, you'll have to suffer- but you can definitely have it". I used to spend every night in bed thinking 'How can I achieve my dreams?' I was prepared to do anything.

None of the people I admire have been exempt from the challenges and stereotypes thwart upon us by family or society. Nelson Mandela, Richard Pryor, Joan Rivers, Kelly Holmes and Gandhi. I admire them all. People who inspire don't set out to inspire their inspiration is a by-product of their achievement. They consequentially plant the seed of ambition into others and provide us with the fuel of hope, without which there is no progress.

I always wanted to be a comedian but I never thought it would be possible. My parents would never allow me, the comedy world would never understand and accept me, I would never make a living, and what if I failed? But I believed in myself.



MENTOR: Boy George advised Shazia in the early years

Self belief is the revenge to all doubters. In comedy I have struggled against people who wish me badly, I have been bullied, I have experienced racism and sexism, I have had tomatoes in my face, I have been sad and lonely, unsupported, I have cried many times and wondered what the hell I am doing?

The comedy world can be a bear pit. I am an outsider in a world of outsiders, but I am motivated by ambition, and the desire to do something with my life, something that I love, but as an Asian woman I know there is a price to pay.

Asian women feel the need to fulfill a role, modern stereotypes are promoted and re-enforced from childhood and we can be easily pigeon holed into the way others think of us, but I'm sure the ethnography of all man involves some expectation.

Asian culture is success-driven. My mum always says, 'I don't care what you do, just be the best at it' she wouldn't care if I was a pimp just as long as I was the best. It takes audacity and courage to make a change but the self confidence one builds from achieving difficult things and accomplishing goals is the best achievement of all. **AW**



This summer Shazia appeared in a BBC documentary entitled *Am I Beautiful*, in which they explored the meaning of beauty and who decides who is and isn't. Shazia also gave a moving insightful interview in *Grazia* magazine entitled *The Day I Discovered I Was Beautiful*. For more fascinating and challenging explorations of beauty be sure to pick up a copy of the next issue of Asian Woman magazine- The Beauty Edition.

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