

Homage to the Wife



Over Vitebsk, Marc Chagall, 1913

I can envision the reaction of the reader upon laying eyes on the title. If a man, the reaction was almost certainly a sickened groan accompanied by a roll of the eyes. If a woman, she might be smiling.

But, I would like to momentarily address myself to the former. I share this male abhorrence to the usual syrupy sweet testimonies about wives that always seem forced. On the other hand, when the testimonial in print is of another relative or friend, the testimonial almost always falls flat due to the writer's inability to convey the uniqueness that he is writing about, plus the fact that the connection was more personal and therefore more intense in impact in person than in print. In such a case, an anecdote or two is sufficient, not an article.

So why am I doing this? If you bear with me, you will see how this tale transcends the usual testimonial (and due to lack of space, I have left out a *lot*).

My wife, Telly, was born in Indonesia, one of five children. A family squabble left them destitute when she was five. For a while, the seven of them lived in the American equivalent of a closet, before moving into a small house made of wood and bamboo. Jobs were sporadic. The mother was at times the main breadwinner, earning a pittance in a garment factory that she had to travel a long distance on foot.

Poverty in America is unofficially defined as not having a car. Poverty in Third World countries is *poverty*. And it is so prevalent that no one outside the family bothers to help out. She remembers times when she would open the cupboards and just stare for a long time at the empty shelves. Sometimes, her mother would cook one egg and mix it in with rice. That was dinner. For seven people. Other times the mother would buy small fish heads and tails from the marketplace; the vendor once asked her how many cats she owned. One time, for two whole days, they didn't eat anything, there was simply no money and no food.

Sofia Loren once said that once you are poor, you never forget, and you always feel Poverty behind you, waiting, just waiting. Telly often feels the same way.

Telly's skin was a bit darker than most Indonesians and she was often ridiculed as being Negro (throughout Asia and South America, lighter skin is preferable than dark skin, especially for women). An uncle of hers who was a Haj—meaning that he had made the pilgrimage to Mecca and was therefore a very moral Muslim—would often tell her not to touch her cousins so her darkness wouldn't rub off on them. On top of everything else, she developed some acne at an early age; her classmates would laugh at her “war face.” As can be imagined, her self-confidence plummeted. Bullying is a way of life in Asia.

Her grandmother and aunt managed to pay for the children's school (school is not free in Indonesia; the extended family pitched in to send the children to school). Occasionally, she would be late with the monthly payment and the school would announce to everyone through the intercom that Telly had not paid up. At such times, her classmates would laugh at her for being poor. It was humiliating. It was meant to be so. Nonetheless, she flourished in school, earning superb grades. She also became proficient in English and German and won first place in a German language contest. She earned some money by doing the rich kids' homework (rich kids everywhere can be spoiled, aimless, and lazy).

She grew very close to her mother, who was very intelligent though uneducated, due to a lack of schooling. Nonetheless, her mother was always eager to learn, a thirst for knowledge inherent in both which continues to this day. She would often play a game with Telly on a blank world map and they would test each other the location of countries, cities, rivers, oceans, mountain ranges, peninsulas, etc. Being good with math, Telly would help her mother make a strict budget with the money earned.

The family's condition improved bit by bit, partly due to some help from family, partly due to odd jobs. They were able to get a castoff television (this was before the modern one with microchips); it had a thick line through the middle of the screen, with the top half the picture on the bottom and the bottom part on the top. Eventually, they were able to fix it. American TV programs helped her learn English (her favorite character was *Sesame Street's* Telly).

When some of Telly's friends found out where she lived and that she was poor, she would never hear from them again.

One of her enduring personality characteristics is tenacity, or grit. It would serve her well. Another was her determination that she would not accept remaining at the

bottom. A third was that she would not accept some of the restraints on women by Indonesian society.

Case in point: After becoming enchanted with the idea of mountain climbing, she joined the all-male mountaineering club at school, though lacking the equipment. With determination, she was able to scrape enough money and borrow used equipment to join an excursion, a high point in her life.



At the end of high school, she received a partial scholarship in another city. Having no funds with which to buy textbooks, or rent a place to live and eat, she tearfully gave it up. Receiving an offer to be sponsored into the United States, she accepted. She flew all the way across the Pacific to a new country, with only \$20 to her name. In the airports and the airplane, she met both Americans and Japanese. The Americans were invariably very friendly and very helpful. The Japanese she met seemed to hold her in disdain. She laughed heartily in the plane watching the movie *Mouse Hunt* as the Japanese passengers stared at her—expressionless, but with obvious disapproval.

After she arrived, we met and dated. We eventually married (we have been married 23 years). Upon being married, I told her that I would support her at whatever she decided to do: stay at home, go to university, or go to work. She chose all three.

Everywhere that she worked she was in great demand as she seemed to do the work of three people—and still does. She found that some American workers are convinced that they should get paid just for showing up at the job. She also observed that foreigners who had been wealthy in their country and had immigrated here had the same attitude. The foreigners who worked really hard were the ones who had known poverty firsthand.

She would change jobs in the next few years until she was

offered her dream job in a multinational company, where she became very popular and for her outfits. Her father told his children to always dress in their best; as if they were already successful. He told her that people judged a person by how they looked. Wasted words at the time. Taken to heart now.

One of her principles by which to live by, or perhaps it is another enduring personality trait, is a very simple one, yet powerful: be nice and kind to other persons. She believes in karma.

At one point in our lives, I suffered a misfortune and she became the main breadwinner for several years. Ultimately, she became an American citizen and she graduated from the university with a business degree.

Fine. All very nice, you say. So what?

Well, the real point here is that she came to America legally, followed the rules and the laws. She did not come here illegally, expecting special treatment in exchange for illegally voting for Democrats. As you may imagine, she (like thousands of other legal immigrants) is furious at the illegals flooding across the border. It's a slap in her face.

Contrary to the leftist mantra and the Critical Race Theory bullshit, she never faced discrimination. On the contrary. Americans were always friendly and welcoming to her, glad to help her, sometimes going out of their way to do so, and whenever possible cutting through red tape on a couple of occasions. The idea of using the "race card" to her advantage was, and is, repugnant to her. At work, she has received compliments on her appearance, only for the men to become concerned that she will go to HR with sexual harassment claims. She has laughed away such nervousness, explaining to them that she is a masculinist, not a feminist.

She was never "oppressed," as the liberals would predict (or insist) so that, at present, she has a superb job where she is

valued, she has a home, a car, two healthy, intelligent children, an enviable wardrobe, sends money to her parents, is in good health and, of course, she has a gorgeous husband. Her whole life is a testimony that the liberals' mantra is a big, fat lie. But it is also a testament to America.

Incidentally, she has also not insisted that all forms and government notices be in Indonesian.

I do not lie, and I do not exaggerate (don't believe me if you want to), when I say that every single week she voices her love for America and her appreciation for being here. America—and Americans—have been very good to her. She never forgets where she was and where she is now.

And anytime that she hears liberals pouring their hatred on this country with their hateful, ideological bullshit, or seeing them burn an American flag, she is *infuriated*.

As am I.

She is equally infuriated that Americans do *nothing* to defend their country from the internal Communists seeking to destroy it.

As am I.