

One friend - Shyam!

Nitin Mendiratta, 27.06.2022

In Class 9th, like every other day, at the beginning of the class, the class monitor collected homework notebooks. However, by the end of the class, teacher changed her mind and gave some new homework. As class monitor was returning our notebooks, a student, jumped with joy, as he received his lost home-work notebook! It was lost last week, the student said.

The “ACP Praduman” inside her Crime Patrol Mind of the teacher claimed that it is very likely that the culprit submitted the stolen notebook and his own notebook together. Therefore, the two students who received their notebooks – one just before and second just after stolen notebook are very likely to be the culprit!

Unfortunately, I was one of them! When teacher questioned us, “Who did it?” – We two accused students, accused each other! Unable to decide, teacher punished both of us! “Go stand in the corner for entire class, with hands up in the air”, She said. Students laughed at us, as we stared each other, angrily.

At the end of the class, bell rang for recess. Forgetting everything, birds released from prison, we students ran outside for canteen, sports ground and to meet friends!

I was outside the Canteen, when someone tapped my shoulder and said Hi. He was from my class only. I have seen him. Ours was a new class, new batch, most of us were new to each other. “I feel sorry that you were punished”, he said. I reiterated my innocence, “I did not steal the notebook!”. He has brought me a burger, offering which, he said, “I know you didn’t... Because I did. I inserted notebooks at different places in the stack”. I looked back at him with surprise. He introduced himself as Shyam, offered a handshake, re-apologised and went away with his friend who was waiting nearby, all the time. I ate the burger!

As the days passed, we became friends. I think this was the first and last time he copied from someone’s notebook. He is different from the impression you may assume from this notebook incident. Few months later, while playing football, I accidentally fractured his foot, his ligaments. His foot was plastered for weeks. He did not even frown, he just smiled! Now, I am also not that bad person, this fracture was an unintentional accident!

For two consecutive Diwali, Shyam came to my house with a hired tempo (goods carrier) fully loaded with fire crackers. He gifted me some very big boxes of fire crackers. Every Diwali, he visited his several friends, to give Diwali gifts of Fire Crackers. Every Holi, he

visited his several friends, to colour them and invite them for a good Maruti Gypsy ride, with favourite songs playing out loud, to a someone’s lawn for party.

A rich man’s son, his father has well taught him not only how to share his wealth with friends but also how to win their hearts and minds. For several years, he sponsored, organized and coordinated our get-togethers on of Holi, Diwali and New Year! No wonder he has so many friends, a large ‘Kutumbh’.

Another time when Shyam surprized me was during our Mathematics - 10th Boards Exams. Just when we were about to enter the examination hall, he realized he has forgotten his Roll Number at home. His parents sent the driver running with the Roll Number from home to school. He also raced his Maruti Gypsy from exam centre towards home. Driver handed him roll number at someplace in middle of the route; and He returned to the examination a good 30 minutes after the start of exam. Yet, he managed to complete and submit his answer sheet 20 minutes before the end of examination! Result? His 92/100 in mathematics were a more pleasant surprize than my 89/100!

Shyam is an automobile enthusiast. “Give your car a new Avtaar” was his mission. His custom modified Maruti Gypsy unified us, all friends, and was a symbol of our friends’ group. His passion of designing and modifying cars cannot be described in words. Even today, one can still notice a spark in his eyes and enthusiasm in his voice, anytime someone brings a technical keyword related to car and automobiles in conversation. Today, he is a successful business man, widely travelled around the world, several times, living in Delhi with his wife Anu. His son Ranvir is taking his automobile dreams to new heights, studying automobiles, specialising in Engineering of Racing Cars at a University in United Kingdom. Shyam has also custom modified my three cars: an old Fiat (Year 1969 make), a Mahindra Thar and a Honda Jazz.

School friends are witnesses of our life, our evolution, our growth and our persistence. In all these years, there were a few real, few severe, few invented reasons for us to become strangers and let each other go, but some friendships find a way to survive. Shyam is forgiving friend, somewhat like this name. We talk and meet few times a year - when I need a practical advice or guidance; or rarely, when he needs a second opinion based on books.

Someone once told me that a man has wasted his entire life, his entire human experience if is not able to make even four good friends, who are willing to be with him till the end, to carry his dead body to funeral place, because of his good karmas, his good friendship. In Shyam, I think, I have found one!