

The Travel Bug

Quotations

“When I think about India, one of the things that always comes to my mind [is] this encounter that I had with a maid, who worked at a guest house I stayed in when I first moved there. [...] She was probably 4’ 10” or definitely under 5 feet tall, and she didn’t speak a word of English. I didn’t speak any Tamil, but she was always really, really friendly and just liked me. And one day, she invited me to come over to her house for lunch – through a translator she invited me. [...] And then, a little while later, we sit down on the bed, which they converted into a table [...] and she puts a plate of chicken and rice in front of me. And then like 10 people in the family are standing up around me, looking at me, and nobody speaks English. So, they’re all staring at me, and she starts picking up pieces of food with her hand and feeding me in my mouth, like I was like a bird, a little baby bird. And that was what lunch was like. (Jane Hermstedt)

“In Japan, for example, one thing that was really interesting for me was being there as a woman. That was the first place, like I said, as an adult that I’d lived abroad. In France I was a student, so it felt different, but in Japan seeing these advertisements, specifically, openly, blatantly calling out age and beauty. ‘Attractive’ would be in the jobs advertisements. And then showing up at these companies and seeing the female teachers pouring tea for their male peers and being expected to do all the administrative stuff for their peers, was really interesting. I think you see your own culture when you step outside of it, and so it was eye opening to see what some of these people didn’t have.” (Jane Hermstedt)

“Our family in Kansas is very small and I have never heard my parents talk about our family honor [...] But for this [Albanian] woman, that was the whole focus. By having a lover in this town, she had shamed the family. [The] penance or acknowledgement of that was laying low, helping the family and the village, working in the house. And you know, again, it’s like a mirror of your own culture, living in these other places. Why don’t we talk about honor? [It’s] an interesting difference” (Jane Hermstedt)

“In the United Arab Emirates there was a legal requirement, at least at the time, that 75% of managerial positions in a national company had to be held by Emiratis. So then, you would have the situation, where a 22 year old, fresh college graduate was supposed to be leading a team with Pakistani and Indian workers who knew the job inside and out, had been with the company since 1978, had had all sorts of positions, and knew a lot more. And that is a really difficult situation to be in as a new manager. And so, my job was to help train them and get them ready, because their tendency would be to come in very authoritarian.” (Jane Hermstedt)

“I used to teach content on conflict management and I had a Pakistani man, who had been in several of my classes, and we were always friendly. He was one of these people

that had been with the company for 30 years and sort of knew everything. He came up to me after one of my classes and asked if he could talk to me, and he looked kind of upset. We had talked about personal versus positional authority and how, as a leader, it is much more effective to rely on personal authority – where people follow you because they want to – and not your positional authority – where they follow you because they report to you. And he said that he had this epiphany in the class, where he thought about how he had been completely estranged from his eldest son in Pakistan, because he realized that he had, for years, relied on his positional authority as the patriarch of the family, expecting his son to do certain things, because he told him so as the father / the patriarch; and that he realized that he hadn't been developing his personal authority. And so we're in the hallway, and he is crying, and he says to me, 'maybe it's not too late.' And I was like, "of course it's not too late!" And we had this amazing conversation, and he ended up reaching out to his son who had had a baby, that he never met..." (Jane Hermstedt)

Vocabulary

Source: Merriam Webster online dictionary www.merriam-webster.com

General Vocabulary

agriculture (noun): the science, art, or practice of cultivating the soil, producing crops, and raising livestock and in varying degrees the preparation and marketing of the resulting products

authoritarian (adjective): of, relating to, or favoring blind submission to authority

chisel (verb): to cut or work with or as if with a chisel

chisel (noun): a metal tool with a sharpened edge at one end used to chip, carve, or cut into a solid material (such as wood, stone, or metal)

dehumanizing (adjective): depriving someone of human qualities, personality, or dignity : demeaning or damaging to a person's humanity or individuality

encompass (verb): include, comprehend

epiphany (noun): an appearance or manifestation especially of a divine being

equate (verb): to treat, represent, or regard as equal, equivalent, or comparable

estranged (adjective): having lost former closeness and affection : in a state of alienation from a previous close or familial relationship

expatriate (noun): a person who lives in a foreign country

fealty (noun): intense fidelity

fidelity (noun): the quality or state of being faithful

forge (verb): to form or bring into being especially by an expenditure of effort

include (verb): to take in or comprise as a part of a whole or group

comprehend (verb): to grasp the nature, significance, or meaning of

intermittent (adjective): coming and going at intervals : not continuous

impose (verb): to establish or apply by authority

manifest (verb): to make evident or certain by showing or displaying

Mapuche (noun): an American Indian people of southern Chile

mortification (noun): the subjection and denial of bodily passions and appetites by abstinence or self-inflicted pain or discomfort

ostentatious (adjective): attracting or seeking to attract attention, admiration, or envy often by gaudiness or obviousness : overly elaborate or conspicuous : characterized by, fond of, or evincing ostentation

parading (verb): to exhibit ostentatiously

patriarchy (noun): social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line

penance (noun): an act of self-abasement, mortification, or devotion performed to show sorrow or repentance for sin

self-abasement (noun): a humiliation of oneself : the act of behaving in a way that makes one seem lower or less deserving of respect

Tamil (noun): a Tamil-speaking person or a descendant of Tamil-speaking ancestors; (Tamil is a Dravidian language of Tamil Nadu state, India, and of northern and eastern Sri Lanka.)

trajectory (noun): a path, progression, or line of development resembling a physical trajectory

value system (noun): the system of established values, norms, or goals existing in a society

viable (adjective): capable of working, functioning, or developing adequately

Discussion Questions

1) “How would you react to a job application that included attractiveness or certain standards of beauty?”

2) “Is honor a relevant issue in your family or your culture? If so, do you think it is an important virtue for a society?”

3) “Do you think a society that sets different standards for female and male employees is inherently sexist?”

4) “Would you rather share your concerns about your cultural or societal norms with a person from your own background, or with somebody who is from a different culture? Which conversation, do you think, would be more productive or honest?”

5) “How important do you think cultural exchanges are to humanity becoming more open-minded and united? Are interactions between cultures always positive, or do they also have the potential to be more divisive than uniting?”