

Daring Dames



Jya



Ankita



Ana



Pushpa

Women of Wonder

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This is a short tribute to women worldwide.

I just returned from a three-week journey through India, Nepal and Bhutan. It was a thought-provoking experience comparing similarities within our global community. I am grateful to have met many lovely people along the way.

During the course of my trip, there were four phenomenal women who made an impact on me. Our brief time together taught me something about myself and about the female essence. Their presence resonated within me. I felt an unconscious understanding of their lives — an unspoken mutual bond — a sense of very little separation in our storylines.

Women are all connected, continuously on a journey of growing our minds, heart, self and way of life. We are delicate and durable. We thrive, survive and struggle every day. We must advocate for all, and celebrate the women who inspire other women.

The impactful women I met brought forward an outer brightness that left me admiring their durability and goodness coming from deep within. They each reminded me of influential females

in my own life. I felt a bridge of connectivity through their heartfelt actions and my whole-hearted associations with my friends and family.

Jya has a contagious enthusiasm and lives in a small village south of Jaipur, India. There was depth in her embrace and purity in her presence. A mother of four children who has been married for twenty years, she is content with life and happy to be alive.

On this day, Jya had plenty of responsibilities to manage. The goat room door needed to be repaired, a walk to fetch water was mandatory and a daily visit to temple where she pays respect to her spiritual teacher — that was her short list. Yet, she was eager to make me feel special. It was her idea to play dress-up. Jya guided me to her closet and selected various bangles, necklaces, a pair of ornate earrings to match my gold and turquoise serape made of silk. There among the colors, the soft silk and her kindness, I felt wrapped in love that day.

This feeling of warmth made me think of my dear friend Laura. Over the years, Laura has shown me what it means to support family, friends and community in good and bad times. Her capacity to give goodness to the world is endless, irrespective of what is taking place in her own life. Each day, she places her family needs before her own. She exemplifies tireless leadership in her domestic responsibilities. I feel blessed to have her friendship wrapped around me for over a decade.

Jya and Laura have set examples for me in my own life. Their actions have shown me the importance of taking time to build relationships and practice kindheartedness daily, despite the chaos in our lives.

Ankita left me mesmerized with her alluring energy and zest for life. She is the front desk manager at a hotel in Thimphu, Bhutan. As I watched her interact with various staff and guests, she would treat each encounter with interest and compassion. I was so impressed with her unique conduct, I asked if we could sit together and chat over a cup of Masala tea. Ankita is a dazzling, modern woman. She is brilliant at her job, spends time with her family every day and continues to obtain her education — all with a smile.

As I observed Ankita and sensed the care and concern she has for others, I remembered my neighbor Ruth. Oh, how I longed to sit and have one more cup of her delicious cinnamon coffee and absorb her discerning ways. Ruth moved to the East coast over five years ago to be closer to her family. We had many discussions on the importance of being the best version you can be of yourself — and those wonderful talks continue to resonate with me. My dear friend Ruth has a positive outlook and her insight on life is unforgettable. She showed me what it means to live life and not let life live you.

Both Ankita and Ruth make family a priority. Their inner contentment shines through in their actions.

Ana is interested in building her own future, although her family members have different plans for her. She lives in Patan, Nepal and is seventeen years old. This tenacious young lady works with her father in their home business as a cooking instructor — teaching tourists how to cook traditional Nepalese food.

This liberated lady is trying to take the lead in her life. Despite her family's desire for her to marry, Ana is in her second year of college taking classes in hospitality management and has no plans to settle with a man or be confined to the family business.

Ana made me think of my youngest sister Brittany Jo who is establishing her own future. My spirited sister is constructing her life one day at a time . . . her way. She graduated from college and found an advertising job in Detroit. She is anxious to tackle the world in an unconventional manner.

It appears that personal freedoms can often get tangled up with traditions. However, both Ana and Brittany Jo remind me of the importance of taking personal risks and following your bliss. Each of these young ladies is beginning their journeys in life — both blazing their own trail. I admire their determination and drive in locating and hanging on to their dreams.

One glance and I could tell a woman named Pushpa represented a strength and depth far beyond my understanding. Her smile illuminated the room when I walked into her spice shop in the Rajasthan region of India. A quiet confidence resonated while she informed me of the various spices from this area. A single glance from her bewitching, deep, brown eyes told me a lifetime of stories in their sparkle.

My great-grandmother Alvina came to mind while listening to Pushpa. She lived for ninety-five years and had the same depth in her eyes. Pushpa's red *bindi* represented a long union of marriage and commitment similar to the wafer thin ring that represented the sixty-eight years of marriage between my great grandmother, Alvina and my great-grandfather, Walter.

Echoing the sage saying, it is not the years in your life but the life in your years that count. These women remind me that age is more than a number; it is a profound presence of life. If each crease in the skin told a story, they would have many chapters to share from their book of life. I smile when I think of the lives both of these women have touched. I will no longer cringe at each wrinkle on my face, knowing that they will bring me closer in spirit and strength to these celebrated women.

Individually, we live our lives in different ways. I continue to marvel at the graciousness and goodness of the human race, and believe we women are at our best when we support and learn from each other. I tingle with excitement thinking about what I have assimilated from my friends across the globe, and the women who are close to my heart at home.

I will remember and relish all the women of wonder in my life. Your selflessness and support has left an imprint on my soul. Our encounters have expanded and enriched my intellectual and emotional landscape. I feel connected to women around the world, regardless of class, culture or circumstance. As individuals we exude brightness from within and have the ability to inspire ourselves and each other.

We all share sisterhood living as women of wonder.