

## **The Fear of Being Dead**

*(This appeared in the 2008 edition of Safar, the Magazine brought out by the students of Centre for Management Studies, Dibrugarh University)*

It was early May 2002. I was then studying at Tezpur University staying at the hostel. Two of my friends had taken ill and they had to be admitted to Kanaklata Civil Hospital, Tezpur. Myself and another friend of mine decided to stay as attendants for the night. My friends were in the *General Ward* and it was in a pitiable condition like all other Government hospitals. By the time evening had set in, the room descended into near darkness with only a bulb to lighten up the big room. The night seemed to belong to the mosquitoes, which were in thousands buzzing around in cacophony. The patients at least had the mosquito nets for cover; my friend and me had nothing to face the onslaught of the mosquitoes. After taking dinner, I decided to make myself comfortable in a vacant bed but the mosquitoes won't allow that. Thinking of taking them head on and also to make the time pass, I started killing the mosquitoes, slapping them in between my hands. In fact by the morning, I had a stockpile of thrashed mosquitoes and that amused many in the ward including a friendly policeman on duty.

Coming back to the real thing. On one corner of the room, was a Tuberculosis patient who I came to know was admitted long back. He was nothing more than a skeleton, with only a distant relative of him by his side. A nurse on duty even told me that this patient would not survive for long. Her words seemed prophetic as around midnight, the man died without a fuss. There was no one even to wail!

It was not that I had not seen death before. As a matter of fact, a distant cousin of mine died when I was a kid in the very bed I sleep at my home. I always had that uncanny feeling that I am not a coward to be afraid of dying. But deep somewhere, I did, in spite of the brave face I used to put to all and sundry whenever the topic of one's death arose. May be it had to do something with the mind, which refuses to look at it in a pragmatic manner. But the death of this man literally in front of my eyes made one of the biggest truths of life look trivial. Death after all is as complicated as you make it to be, as so many other things in life. Had I turned philosophical for a moment or had I re-discovered a big facet of life itself? I, at that moment had no answer.

A few days later, I was driving a bike inside the University campus, which is full of ninety degrees turns. I must say that I was at some speed. As I was about to negotiate a sharp turn, a car just popped up from nowhere, it seemed. I applied the brakes and somehow the car didn't crush me, as it zoomed past me. Even at that speed and the curve I was to negotiate, I thought I was lucky to have been able to control the bike. The few persons that were nearby seemed shell shocked. But I could feel that I was ice cool, even my heartbeats seemed so normal. Had I overcome the fear of dying? Realizing that I was equally guilty, I gave up the idea of having a go at the car and the matter ended there itself.

I had to wait only for a few more days for the answer. A couple of weeks later, the University bus I was traveling in fell off the newly constructed road and headed straight for a ditch. But the soft soil prevented it in its journey towards the ditch. There was total chaos inside the bus with many of them screaming, especially those belonging to the fairer sex and others heaving a sigh of relief. I allowed myself a little smile, felt my normal heartbeats and waited for the others to get out of the bus, before I did. It seemed that I had finally overcome the fear of being dead. Welcome to being alive without the fear of being dead!