

International Day of Women and Girls in Science

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly made the decision to establish 'International Day of Women and Girls in Science' to bring forward and promote the vital role that women play in the field of science. Since women account for just around 35% of workers in the various STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields, it is necessary that parents, teachers and schools begin to include girls in these disciplines at a younger age. 'International Day of Women and Girls in Science' promotes full and equal access and participation in science, through education, opportunities, finances and more.

#THEATER

CELEBRATING EVERLASTING LOVE

Relive the poignant tale of 'Better Half,' where audiences were immersed in the timeless love saga of Prashant and Sudha Chatterjee. Through captivating performances and powerful storytelling, this theatrical masterpiece explored themes of love, sacrifice, and resilience, leaving a lasting impact on all who witnessed it.



Tusharika Singh
Freelance writer and city blogger

Imagine this scene. A serene lakeside bench, where an elderly couple, sit deeply in love after three decades of marriage, sit together. The timeless Bollywood melody 'Tere Bina Zindagi se Koi Shikwa Toh Nah' softly fills the air. Just in time for Valentine's Day, Jawahar Kala Kendra presented a moving narrative of enduring love in their forthrightly theater series, titled 'Better Half.'

The play follows the evocative journey of Prashant and Sudha Chatterjee, a quintessential elderly Bengali couple. Neeti Shrivastava's portrayal of Sudha captivated the audience with her 'authentic Bengali' mannerisms and dialogue delivery.

Artists from *Chena Rang Samuh* brought to life this touching tale on stage, conceptualized, written, and directed by Ashish Shrivastava. This pioneering play in Rajasthan seamlessly blended a spectrum of emotions including love, compassion, separation, selfishness, and selflessness.



Usha Uthup is, undoubtedly, the queen of Indian pop, who did not have to 'westernise' herself to become a famous household name. Infact, she pioneered the ethnic Indian look, complete with sari, bindi and lots of flowers in that single signature plait, flowing down her broad back. She created the very innovative bindi by turning the Bengali letter 'Kaw' (the first Bengali alphabet that spells out 'Kolkata') and using it to decor her forehead, to justify her personal tribute to the city in which she has lived in, for decades together. It is her 'unique style statement' for her song, *Kolkata, Kolkata, Kolkata*.

LENDING 'NIGHTCLUB SINGING' A DIGNITY

Dr. Shoma A. Chatterjee
Film scholar, journalist & author

Usha Uthup has just been bestowed with the Padma Shri by the Government of India on Republic Day, 2024. But shouldn't this title have come much earlier than now? She has been shaking up the musical world for many years, now and

at 76, is still going as strong as ever. Infact, one can safely state that it is the *Padma Shri* that has been enriched by her name than the other way round. She has given music a completely 'new identity,' not just musically and through her gruff voice and musical talent, but by changing the visual identity of nightclub music.

Usha's concert tours have taken her to USA, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Mombasa, Nairobi, UK, Vienna, Dubai, Doha, Bahrain, Sharjah, Muscat, Kuwait, South Africa, Russia, Fiji Islands and Canada, where she brought



USHA UTHUP AND VICTOR BANERJEE IN BOW BARRACKS FOREVER.

50,000 to their feet! Her Ukrainian and Kazakh songs touched the hearts of all. She also sings in several Indian languages such as Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, Assamese, Oriya, Khasi, Gujarati, Marathi, Konkani, Malayalam, Kannada, Tamil and Telugu. An international personality, Usha, sings in French, German, Italian, Sinhalese, Swahili, Roasian, Nepalese, Arabic, Creole and of course, English.

Usha Uthup or 'Didi,' as she is often referred to, was brought up in

They later came to be known as *The Sami Sisters*, who began performing way back in the fifties. We had this family trait of doing things together and this included music and singing. We would go on picnics and would look forward to summer vacations, a big thing in life, where our wants were very little. We were given two pairs of shoes, one black and one white, two sets of uniforms and that was it."

Usha Uthup is, undoubtedly, the queen of Indian pop, who did not

got up and began to sing 'Caesar.' That was my very first public performance. I sang two more songs. The applause was thunderous and I went on to sing for an hour. The owner asked me if I would sing for a week and instead of cash, he gave me a beautiful *Kanjivaram sari*.

the bustling metropolis of Bombay (then). She was never trained in music formally and in her first ever music class, she was turned out because the music teacher felt that her voice was not suited to singing! But she insists that her 'passion for music' was present right from the moment she uttered her first words.

"I am deeply indebted to my two siblings, Indira and Uma, who taught me that it is extremely important to be a good listener, if one wanted to be a good singer.

"Because of my nightclub

have to 'westernise' herself to become a famous household name.

Talking of old days, Usha says, "Contrary to popular notions about my beginning of career at Park Street, my singing began in Chennai and not in Kolkata. It happened by chance. We had gone to Chennai to visit an aunt. One evening, she took us for a treat at the Nine Gems. This was a sort of a restaurant-cum-nightclub place, set in a multiplex, comprised of three theatres, Blue Diamond, Sapphire and Emerald. There was a band playing. My aunt told me, 'Why don't you get up and sing?' I got up and began to sing 'Caesar.' That was my very first public performance, beyond my school concerts. I sang two more songs. The applause was thunderous and I went on to sing for an hour. The owner asked me if I would sing for a week and instead of cash, he gave me a beautiful *Kanjivaram sari*. Fresh demands began to pour in from several quarters. The Golden Bowl at the Saveria Night Club, and then at the Ritz Hotel, followed by a small nightclub called The Little Heart, where I sang for two weeks under a proper contract. I must have just stepped into my 20s. It was an awesome experience."

Asked to go into the nostalgia mode and remember her Park Street days, Usha says, "Park Street, at the time I began my professional

#USHA UTHUP



singing, my name soon reached Kolkata. I sang *Fever* for my first performance at Park Street. Those were the days when Junior Statesman, a weekly tabloid, was a hot favourite among youngsters. It gave me a very good write-up. I have never ever had a bad press. I listened to a lot of jazz, Frank Sinatra, Barbra Streisand, Pelecano, etc. Fortunately, my arrival on the nightclub music scene coincided when India was desperately waiting to come out of its musical strait-jacket. Here was a woman stepping into the nightclub scenario, where the audience was composed mostly of men. With a lady stepping in to sing, many men began to come with their wives and children and the ambience began to change. It is thrilling to remember and realise that I was actually a part of this wonderful socio-cultural revolution.

The *Kanjivaram saris*, the big bindi on the forehead, the flowers in my hair, and the long plait, hanging down my back, spelt out 'Indianness' in every sense. I have often been asked by people, why can't they dress like you?"

Asked to go into the nostalgia mode and remember her Park Street days, Usha says, "Park Street, at the time I began my professional

customers have changed. But as I said earlier, I am the same and both, Trincaas and Park Street, mean the same to me, as they did in the late 1960s."

Usha was shocked when she was asked to get a license to sing at a nightclub, when she landed the contract with Trincaas. She had to get special police permission because there was this belief that 'you would sit at tables to solicit.' She applied for a license at *Lalbazar* and her real career in 'nightclub singing'

Something else happened during this time. On the very first night I sang at Trincaas, I met my husband. He was working for J. Thomas & Co. at that time. He is a Malayali while I am a Tamilian. We met, fell in love and married in 1971."

began. Slowly, the taxes went up for the restaurateurs and nightclub owners, which brought about a decline in live music, being performed at night. At a princely sum of Rs.1500.00 per month, she was the highest paid person at Trincaas. This was way back in 1969 and she was very happy with whatever she got.

"Something else happened during this time. On the very first night I sang at Trincaas, I met my husband. He was working for J. Thomas & Co. at that time. He is a Malayali while I am a Tamilian. We met, fell in love and married in 1971. He was transferred to Cochin, soon after and we shifted there. We had two children, a boy and a girl, in Cochin. By then, I had broken the stigma attached to 'nightclub singing.' I have been blessed with an extremely supportive family and a very loving husband, who never interferes but supports me, all the way," she says, flashing her captivating smile.

Albums like 'Down Memory Lane with Usha Uthup,' a collection of very interesting tracks, is Usha's tribute to the good old days. These are the numbers that contributed towards popularity in the late 70s and early 80s. The most memorable of them all are Love Story, Listen to the falling rain, Hotel California, Killing me softly and We'll meet

again. Usha began her own recording studio in Kolkata in 1982 called *Studio Vibrations*. It occupies an area of 2400 sq. feet of floor area and is fully air-conditioned. Besides a canteen facility, it has two rhythm and voice booths, fully equipped with balanced inputs for all electrical equipments, stereo headphones, etc. In 2006, Usha broke new ground by acting in *Pothan Vava*, with wonderful actors like Mammooty and Nedumudi Venu.

"It is not as if I always sing for

money," she says, adding, "I have sung for charitable causes as well. Among these are The Red Cross, SPASTIC society of India, Mother Teresa related charities, cancer institutes, schools for the blind, old age homes, government charity drives and various drought and flood relief funds. I have worked extensively for service organizations like the Rotary, Lions, Jaycees, Giants, SPCA etc. at national and international levels." She also acted in a few films like the Malayalam

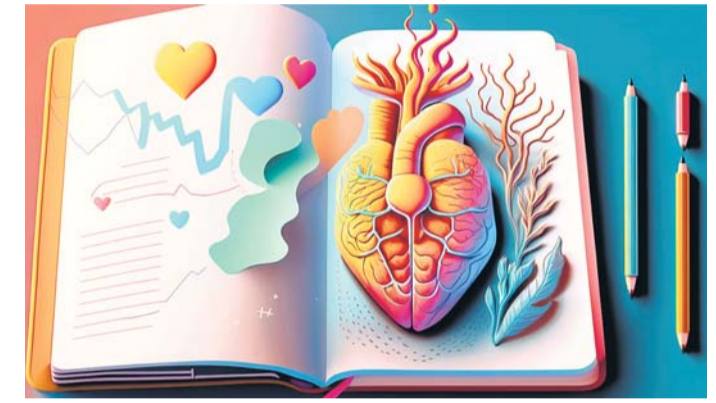


USHA UTHUP AND PARNO MITTRA IN EIGHT TO EIGHT BENGALI FILM.

#NEUROSCIENCE

Boosting Brain Connectivity, Learning, and Memory

Recent neuroscience research helps explain why, when it comes to learning and remembering, 'writing by hand' is better than 'typing with a keyboard.'



The pen is truly mightier than the keyboard.

Research has long indicated that 'writing by hand' carries significant benefits over 'typing with a keyboard,' especially when it comes to learning, remembering, and creativity. Now, researchers from Norway may have discovered exactly why that is the case by investigating the underlying neural networks involved in both writing and typing.

We show that when writing by hand, brain connectivity patterns are far more elaborate than when typewriting on a keyboard," writes Audrey van der Meer, a brain researcher at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology and co-author of the study. "Such widespread brain connectivity is known to be crucial for memory formation and for encoding new information and, therefore, is beneficial for learning."

How can this knowledge help you? To help answer that question, let's dive more deeply into the research and see how you can apply these discoveries to your work.

How writing by hand helps you learn

For the study, 36 university students were repeatedly prompted to either write or type words, as they appeared on a screen. They either wrote in cursive on a touch screen using a digital pen or used a single finger to type on a keyboard. Researchers used a high-density electroencephalogram (EEG), a test that measures electrical activity in the brain, to determine results. When participants wrote by hand, the researchers observed that

connectivity of different brain regions increased. This did not occur when they typed. The researchers concluded, therefore, that the process of forming 'letters by hand' resulted in greater 'brain connectivity' and promoted 'learning.'

For example, kings in ancient Israel were required to write a copy of the law by hand. In doing so, they not only learned the intricacies of the law but also were enabled to better understand it and remember it.

In modern times, business copywriters use the same technique to improve their ability to write with persuasion. By transcribing successful advertisements from other famous copywriters, they internalized standard copywriting principles, thereby improving their writing abilities.

So, how can you use this knowledge to your advantage? Follow the rule of writing.

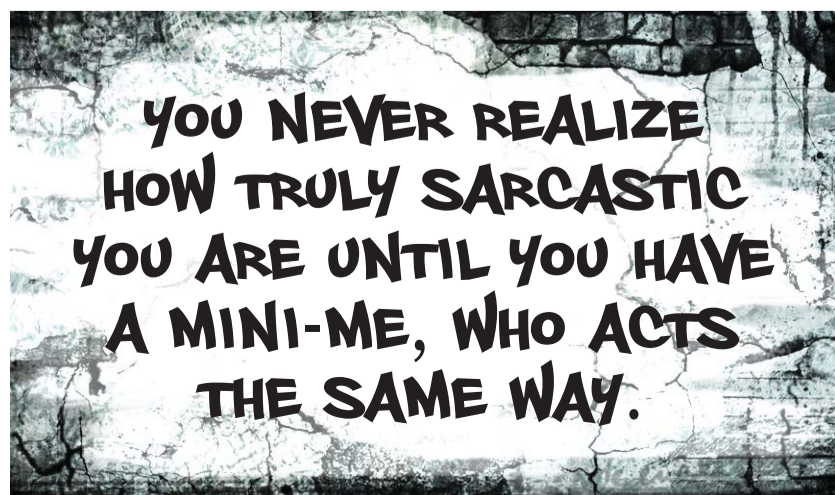
The rule of writing says that if you want to clarify your thinking, remember something important, or communicate effectively clearly, write it down by hand. Doing so will help you slow down and think, which helps you internalize what you've written.

At the end of your writing session, try to summarize your findings in a few sentences. Write as if you were explaining the topic to a young child. The simpler you can explain the topic, the better you understand it.

So, the next time you want to better remember, learn, or understand, remind yourself: Don't type. Write.

Doing so will help you slow down and think, enabling you to leverage more of your brain and your senses in the process.

THE WALL

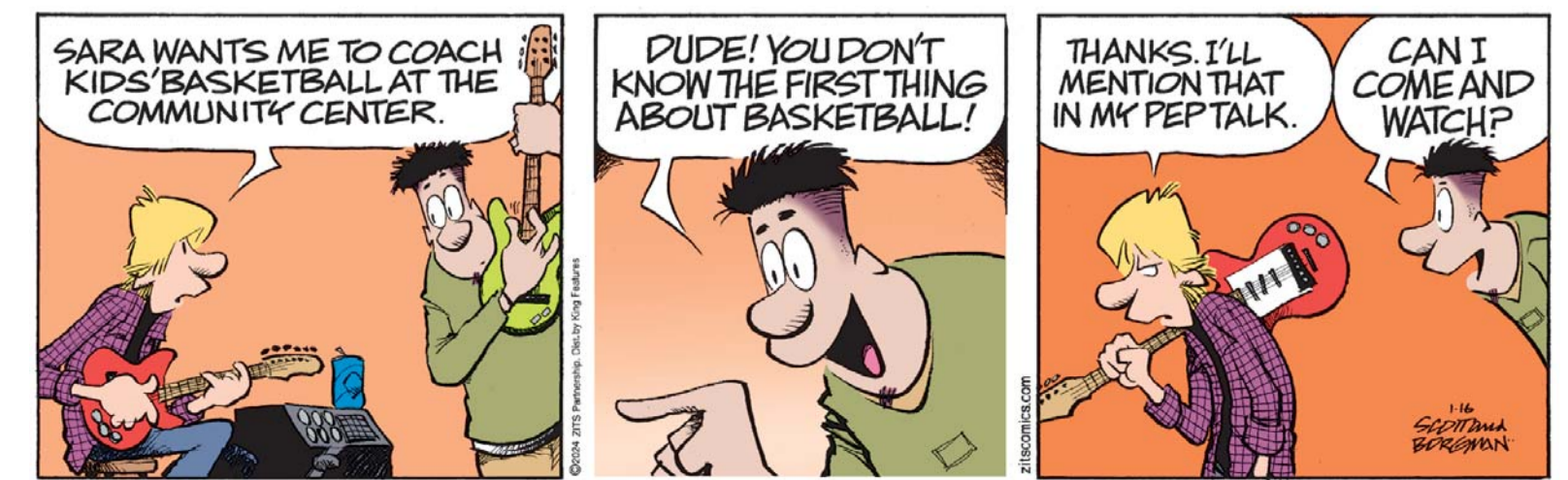


BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman