

From the Editor

I like to joke to people that I used to be a good aunt, but now I am a great one.

My Great Aunt-hood has come about because of the delightful additions to our family of Kyle, Kiki and Hailey, charmers all.

If you had asked me, even 20 years ago, to picture a "Great Aunt," a black-clad, gimlet-eyed, lace cap wearing figure would have come to mind—not unlike Dame Edna May Oliver playing Lady Catherine DeBourge in the first film version of "Pride & Prejudice."

Now, however, I picture someone quite different—a hip, sassy lady who is always willing to play Candy Cane Lane and has an awareness, however imprecise, of "The Backyardigans."

My own Great Auntness came to mind reading a recent story on the Internet from BBC Urdu (yes, apparently there is a BBC Urdu!). Headlined, "India's sharp-shooter granny fighting male domination," the story of this particular "granny," gave me a certain pause.

"At first glance there is nothing remarkable about Parkaso Tomar, a hardy 70-something woman who has spent most of her life working in the fields and tending to cattle in a small north Indian village," the story began.

"Until of course she picks up a gun and fires a volley of shots, all bang on target.

She is the 'shooter granny' of Johri village in Uttar Pradesh, a northern province infamous for honour killings and female foeticide. Not the best of places for girls

to grow up," it continued.

"This is where Parkaso Tomar has become an unlikely role model, inspiring a new generation of female shooters ever since she picked up a gun for the first time. And that was well after she had turned 60," the story said.

Tomar turned to shooting to do what aunts, grannies, sisters and female friends have been doing forever—help out a young female relative; in fact, mentor. Tomar went to a public shooting range to support her granddaughter, taking along her much older sister-in-law.

"I got my granddaughter admitted here, but she said she was afraid of coming alone so I started accompanying her. Then one day I picked up a gun and fired a shot, and it was quite good. So the coach said I should start practicing and that I had the potential to be good," said Tomar in the interview.

As the story continued, Tomar developed not only skill, but a genuine love of shooting, practicing at home against rocks and water jugs.

"The grannies were so good, a lot of the regulars stopped turning up at competitions to avoid being humiliated at the hands of a woman," said their coach.

"Everyone poked fun at us, but my sister-in-law and I paid no heed to them. Some would say: 'Now she will follow her son into the army. What are they trying to do? Become outlaws?'" said Parkaso, who eventually defeated a Deputy Inspector General of the police in her first match.

Now Tomar's home attests to her skills, with medals and trophies.

She takes great pride in her achievements, but having inspired the young makes her the proudest.

Neetu Solanki is one who swears by the grandmother. She too is an international shooter, having represented India at competitions in Hungary and Germany.

"The grannies are so much older than us, so we thought if they can do it, why can't we?," says Neetu.

"They showed us the way and now shooting has changed the lives of so many of us. Some have found jobs with the army, and the exposure to life outside the village is changing our worldview.

"When young girls say if Granny can do it, why can't we? I say to them: work hard and keep your chin up and you will go places."

The story concluded, "This is a male dominated society, a female child is not always welcome. But thanks largely to granny Parkaso, young girls and boys stand here shoulder-to-shoulder, punching holes in paper targets, and unprogressive mindsets."

As many of us know, it's never too late to take up shooting, one of the very few sports that doesn't discriminate by age. It's never too late, either, to mentor another woman, and in doing so, make a difference.

And, if in doing so, someone mistakes a Great Aunt for a Granny, well, never mind—you can always show the whippersnappers up on the range.

Peggy

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