

More than **meets** THE EYE

Author of *InSight*, visually impaired **Miriam Batliwala** talks to **Rhea Dhanbhora** about hiding her disability, accomplishing goals in spite of it and her recently released book



Jaina Kumar | HRM

MIRIAM IN A NUTSHELL

- She worked at the Tea Board without letting anyone know she was blind.
- She is a Trustee of the H.I.M.S. Botawala Charities, which runs a school for 1,000 children in Rander, Gujarat and D.M. Girls' Orphanage Trust, which houses and educates underprivileged girls
- She is a certified Iyengar yoga instructor, a skilled dancer, swimmer and golfer.
- She has also mastered several languages including Italian and French.

You can pick up her book at www.flipkart.com, Strand, Fort and Oxford Bookstore, Marine Lines for ₹225.

>> Miriam has not let her lack of vision hamper her dreams and ambitions

While most of us struggle to keep one job, Miriam Batliwala has mastered Italian and French, knows how to play the piano, has worked in Europe, is a certified Iyengar yoga instructor and is a mother and a wife while learning how to dance, swim and play golf. And that's not all that makes her a force to reckon with! The author of the recently released book, *InSight*, is also visually challenged. The book shares the story of her life from when she started losing her eyesight at the age of 12. Miriam shares her inspiring story with us...

Tell us a little bit about your background?

I was born and brought up in Bombay. My father, Ebrahim Usuf Botawala, was originally from Surat and my mother Sheila was brought up in Rangoon. They decided to live in Bombay after they were married. My father came from an affluent family and his father and grandfather had sugar plantations and sugar factories in Mauritius and a trading business of spices and commodities to Mauritius. They adapted to western culture and were very sporty; playing golf, tennis and learning how to ride horses. So, my siblings and I were encouraged to indulge in various sports.

You started to lose your eyesight when you were quite young. How did you deal with it?

I got to where I am because of my mother. She took me to various doctors and even after realising nothing could be done, did not make it an issue, even though it was difficult for her. My siblings did the same. So, because they didn't make a big deal, I learnt how to deal with it without making it a handicap. I found my own way to do things without being molly coddled. I knew if I had to do it, I had to do it in my own way, no matter what the obstacles were.

You kept your impairment a secret for a really long time. Was there a particular reason?

First off, it was because I wanted to be like everybody else. I had to act normal and I did not want anyone's sympathy. So, I thought it was best to deal with it in my own way. In my twenties, I refused to tell anyone, because I knew it would hinder my independence, since I was looking for a job. I didn't want people I worked with to know I had a major eye problem.

How did you manage to hide it. Why did you decide to let people know finally?

I hid it more during my working days because I did not want to lose my job. But, all the hiding became stressful for me

and there were a lot of misunderstandings. People used to think I was a snob because I would pass by without greeting them. This troubled me and then fortunately, at the Erhard Seminars Training (EST), my trainer said that the truth was the only way I could get away from this and that there was no shame in admitting it. It was alright, people would accept me in spite of my eye problem.

And after all that, you've managed to achieve more than most of us with sight could. How did you manage it? Through my sheer will, determination and maintaining a positive attitude.

Do you think people take the gift of sight too lightly?

Yes, I definitely think people take it too lightly.

What made you decide to share your experiences in *InSight*?

People always heard anecdotes about my life, which I shared with them. And a lot of them told me it was all so inspiring that I should write it down to inspire others. I really hope I've managed to do that.

With such a full set of accomplishments, is there anything else on your to-do list?

Now I'd just like to become more accomplished at the things I do.

Tell us a little bit about your book?

The book is about my life. It's the story of when I became visually impaired, how I managed without extra help in boarding school, went to college, travelled and worked in Europe for four years. It's about marriage, helping my son grow up and working in different areas of my life with this handicap.

Which chapter in the book was the most difficult to write for you?

None of the chapters were difficult; it's the story of my life.

Which is your favourite chapter and why?

All the chapters detailing my escapades at the Tea Board, where no one knew I was blind. Because I was always one up on my boss at the time!

What has the response been towards your book? Can you share any memorable reactions with us?

Whoever has read the book, said that they couldn't put it down once they picked it up. One of my sister's friends, a lawyer, had not read a book since he left college. This book, he read all weekend and loved it. All my friends in Mumbai, Delhi and overseas have found the book frank, inspiring, easy to read and interesting.