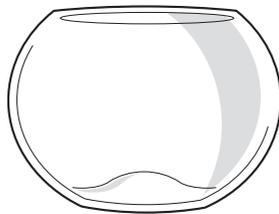


Big Glass Bowl.

Big Glass Bowl.

There was a big glass bowl. Like this:



Lots of people lived inside the big glass bowl. But many, many more didn't. Those living inside the bowl liked living inside the bowl. It was big and it was glass.

Imagine the feeling of living inside the big glass bowl as feeling like this: a soft and snuggly 'ill-days-blanket' thrown around you and pulled so tight you can't help but

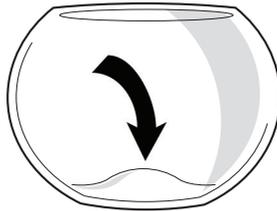
smile at its coziness. There is cinnamon chai lattes, efficiency-rated central heating and all sorts of fantastic entertainment bouncing around on digital screens of variant sizes and widths. That's what being inside the big glass bowl feels like. So, you can see why the people living inside the bowl loved living inside the bowl.

Some people were born in the bowl. That's nice. Some people managed to climb into the bowl: Maybe they worked really hard (like they were told to) to save up lots of bowl-accessing Redeemable Access Vouchers (RAVs); or maybe they fell in love with someone who was already living inside the big glass bowl and were allowed to go and live with them (because they looked right or something); or maybe they were born VeryCleva™ and could do something to help the people in the bowl like making cinnamon chai lattes or fixing efficiency-rated central heating units so were allowed into the bowl. Lucky them.

The bowl was big, as I have already said. But it wasn't absolutely humongously big – so not everyone outside the big glass bowl could fit in it. Well, maybe if the people living in the bowl shuffled together a little more and ordered two spoons to share their cinnamon chai latte then plenty more could fit in. But they didn't really want to do that. They liked things as they were, they didn't like sharing their spoons. And anyway, it was their big glass bowl. (Not that they had bought it or anything, it was just accepted that it was theirs because they (or at least their parents and grandparents and great grandparents) had looked after it for a very long time. So, you know, finders keepers, possession is nine tenths, boo-hoo hard-luck-you etc. etc).

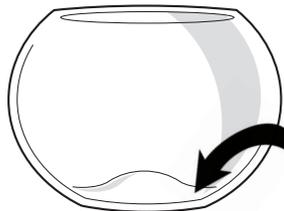
Now, outside the bowl wasn't quite as nice. Some bits were, but lots of bits weren't. In fact some places outside the bowl could be downright horrible. There was things like: Starvation. Water contamination. Wholesale genocide. Ethnic cleansing. Gang rape. That sort of thing. Well no cinnamon chai latte anyway. So very rarely did anyone from inside the bowl want to swap places with someone living outside it. One or two would occasionally venture out to have a peek at the people who lived outside the glass bowl. But the people inside the big glass bowl didn't like to hear what they had to say when they returned. They closed their eyes really, really tight, put their fingers in their ears and went la la la.

Back inside the big glass bowl most people were very happy. At least those in the middle of the bowl were. In the base of the bowl was a slightly raised middle-rump. Like this:



And it was nice living there on the middle-rump. 'Ill-days-blanket' nice. Stimulating. Life affirming. Ahhh, good for them. Anyone living on the middle-rump had a pleasant time. There were activities they could do during the daylight hours (to earn Redeemable Access Vouchers (RAVs) and to feel VeryCleva™) and dinner parties at night where they could tell each other about how many Redeemable Access Vouchers (RAVs) they had gathered and how VeryCleva™ they were. And how great everything was living on the middle-rump.

Lots of people however, who lived in the big glass bowl, didn't live on the middle-rump. They lived in the lower-gutter. That's here:



Some people were born in the lower-gutter. That's a shame. Some just fell into it. Maybe they were unlucky. Maybe they were: Disabled. Addicted. Abused as a tot. Riddled immobile by some really nasty degenerative disease (multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, osteoporosis, Alzheimer's, Huntington's, Parkinson's, chronic traumatic encephalopathy, cancer, that sort of thing) and other unfortunate circumstances that

meant they found it hard to climb on to the middle-rump. The people on the middle-rump could have leaned over the side and given them a hand up (some did) but mainly they'd rather not. Remember; they didn't want to have to shuffle together or share two spoons. So the people in the lower-gutter that tried to crawl up the side would soon roll back down (it was very slippery and when it rained the lower-gutter filled with rain water. And worse. Like waste effluent that ran off the middle-rump).

Occasionally the people on the middle-rump felt a little bad for the ones in the lower-gutter (not often) and suggested some ideas to them – like if they were VeryCleva™ and opened a shop selling cinnamon chai latte or set up a business making efficiency-rated central heating units they might be allowed to join them. They would suggest other helpful things like: “Pull yourselves together” and “Get yourselves an education”.

The people on the middle-rump would lower down ULearnUEarn Ladders for the people in the lower-gutter. ULearnUEarn Ladders were available to everyone they said. Especially those that worked very, very hard, went to the right schools and borrowed lots and lots of Redeemable Access Vouchers (RAVs). And also, if they were very grateful and minded how they spoke. Lots of people in the lower-gutter felt a bit patronised by all this but had a go anyway. Many others had brains that didn't quite work that way (NotAsCleva™). It was best, everyone agreed, to just ignore those particular people.

The people on the middle-rump owned a really large piece of paper. On the really large piece of paper they would write messages for the people in the lower-gutter to read. It might be things like:

‘REDEEMABLE ACCESS VOUCHERS ARE HARD TO UNDERSTAND
– LEAVE THEM TO US’

or

‘WORK VERY HARD AND YOU TOO CAN HAVE SOME
REDEEMABLE ACCESS VOUCHERS’

or

‘TOO MANY PEOPLE IN THE LOWER-GUTTER EXPECT
REDEEMABLE ACCESS VOUCHERS FOR DOING NOTHING. PAH!’

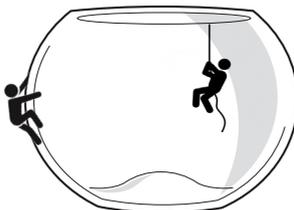
or

‘SEE THOSE PEOPLE OUTSIDE OUR BIG GLASS BOWL
– THEY WANT TO GET IN AND GET HOLD OF YOUR REDEEMABLE ACCESS
VOUCHERS (AND RAPE YOUR WOMEN)’.

The really large piece of paper changed every day and the people on the middle-rump felt so well protected by it that they kept giving Redeemable Access Vouchers (RAVs) to the people who wrote it so that they could write lots more messages to the people in the lower-gutter. The people who wrote it had more Redeemable Access Vouchers (RAVs) than they knew what to do with and felt VeryCleva™ indeed. Everybody agreed (on the middle-rump) that the really large piece of paper was a wonderful thing and they were lucky to have it. Without it, they all agreed (on the middle-rump), they might have to think-for-themselves-and have-an-opinion-about-things-(like-what-was-going-on-outside-the-bowl-for-example) and that scared them. It was best all round they agreed (on the middle-rump) that someone else did the thinking.

Outside the big glass bowl they didn’t have many Redeemable Access Vouchers (RAVs). So they couldn’t afford to make a really large piece of paper of their own to tell the people living in the bowl what it was really like out there. Anyway, for those living inside the big glass bowl, it was easier to imagine that the people outside the big glass bowl deserved to be there because: 1) They looked a little bit different. 2) They ate funny things. 3) They believed in things that didn’t make much sense.

Then one day a big storm came. The people living inside the big glass bowl were fine – even the ones in the lower-gutter (it was as snug and warm and as ‘ill-days-blanket’ comfortable as ever it was). But outside the bowl lots of people had things like this happen: Heads chopped off. Families murdered. Homes burned to the ground. Small children drowned in the sea. That sort of thing. So, lots and lots of them tried to climb up the side of the big glass bowl. Like this:



The people outside the big glass bowl waved furiously at the people inside the big glass bowl. Some held up pieces of cardboard with 'HELP US' and 'WHERE IS WORLD' written on them. Lots of people in the lower-gutter shuffled together to make room and waved at the people outside the big glass bowl to come on in. But on the middle-rump the really large piece of paper urged the people in the lower-gutter to think again. It said things like:

'THEY WANT YOUR JOBS'

and

'THERE'LL BE LESS REDEEMABLE ACCESS VOUCHERS TO GO ROUND'

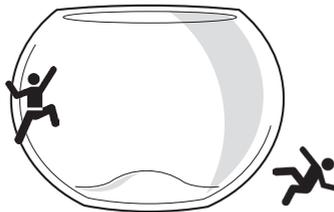
and

'WHERE ARE WE GOING TO PUT THEM ALL?

(WE DON'T WANT THEM, SO CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR).

So the people in the lower-gutter shuffled back apart, shrugged apologetically and looked the other way.

The sides of the big glass bowl were very slippery. It was not easy to climb. Many of the people climbing the outside of the big glass bowl were too weak and hungry to hold on (they had travelled a long way to reach the bowl). So they lost their grip and fell into the sea. Like This:



Oh well.

THE END

Boo. That shouldn't be THE END. Is that really THE END? I live on the middle-rump. I am a writer. I am also a dreamer. There are quite a lot of us dotted about – on the middle-rump, in the lower-gutter, inside and (I'm guessing many, many more) outside of the big glass bowl. As a dreamer I can't believe that this is 'THE END'. As a writer I want to keep on writing the story. So I will.

I will write about the future of the big glass bowl: In the future all the dreamers will get together (wherever they are from). We will group as one to buy a giant box of phosphorus matches (the dreamers from the middle-rump will have to pay the most Redeemable Access Vouchers (RAVs) for the matches – but that is okay as we are the lucky ones who have been born on the middle-rump or are blessed enough to be VeryCleva™).

One by one we will put the lit matches to all four corners of the really large piece of paper and watch it turn into flakes of ash that drift away on the wind.

The dreamers amongst us who are writers and artists will write (there's far better writers than me) and draw how they see the big glass bowl in the future. They see it without sides. They see it without a rump in the middle and they see it without a gutter around the edge. They see it big and round and flat. They call it a plate. The big flat plate. It has no edges to climb up (or slip down) and no gutters to get lost in. Just a big space where everybody lives together. It will look like this:



Everybody will be happy living on the big flat plate. With no inside or outside, no middle or lower, there will be no need for Redeemable Access Vouchers (RAVs). There will be no need for a really large piece of paper to tell us what we should all think (we will all think it's great), and the VeryClevas™ will share their cinnamon chai lattes and efficiency-rated central heating systems with the NotAsClevas™. Well, why wouldn't they?

THE *(new and much better)* END