

short answer to those people is, “Have you ever watched *The Golden Girls*?”

MC: Why do you think people won't take no for an answer?

JK: I think some parents think, Oh, having kids is so beautiful; I want others to feel the joy I do. On a bad day, I think I offend these people because they know how hard it is to be parents and wish they had known not having them was an option! With men, I think they just don't like a woman without a maternal instinct.

MC: But you found a guy who also didn't want kids and you married him.

JK: The marriage didn't work out, but since then I've met a lot of other guys who don't want kids. I tend to withdraw quickly if a guy wants a family. I don't want to waste his time.

MC: Do you think women who aren't mothers should get more respect?

JK: Yes! Or please don't assume that you know what I'm doing with my life. I tweeted about running errands one Sunday and somebody tweeted at me, “while you're strolling around we”—meaning parents—“have places to be.” Sometimes I feel like if two parents were given \$100, and a child-free person was given \$100, everyone would assume that the parents would invest their money wisely because they're smart. And people like me would just go buy candy.

MC: You write about an older woman you revered when you were younger who worked next to you at a theater box office in Boston. She wore a tailored black dress and lacquered red nails and went to the theater in Manhattan every weekend. Was she

your child-free inspiration?

JK: Miriam. I was 22, broke, single, and miserable. She was 62, broke, single, and fabulous. She did her own thing, never asked permission, and never apologized.

MC: So when did you know you were a Miriam?

JK: I always knew I was a Miriam. Parents talk a lot about how much strength and dedication it takes to raise a child. I think it also takes a lot of strength and dedication to carve out a life that doesn't seem normal to anyone else.

“ People say to me, ‘Who will take care of you when you're old?’ My short answer: ‘Have you ever watched *The Golden Girls*?’”

Sonali Mukherjee fought back against acid attacks.



SAVING SONALI

A 27-year-old acid attack victim in India desperately wanted to end her life—until she landed a spot on the country's hottest game show

By Kavitha Rao

In 2003, Sonali Mukherjee was a vivacious 17-year-old college student living in Dhanbad in eastern India when her life was devastated by three male neighbors. The men sexually harassed Mukherjee every morning as she left for class. When she threatened to tell police, the men crept into her room one night and doused her with acid. She was brutally disfigured: The acid burned off most of her face, leaving her almost blind and partially deaf.

Although there are no figures for acid attacks in India, they're almost always perpetrated against women—as are nine-tenths of all violent crimes in India—and activists say such crimes are on the rise. Worse, many perpetrators escape severe punishment. (Mukherjee's three attackers were each sentenced to nine years in prison but were released after serving a little more than two.)

During the next nine years, Mukherjee underwent 22 painful reconstructive surgeries that bankrupted her family. Last year, needing still more surgery that she couldn't afford, the despondent Mukherjee wanted to end her life. “I thought it would be better to die,” she says. Because euthanasia is illegal in India, Mukherjee wrote a letter to the government requesting permission.

Then something extraordinary happened. Before the government replied, Mukherjee's heart-wrenching letter was leaked to the media and went viral. Moved by her story, a producer on the country's most popular TV quiz show, *Kaun Banega Crorepati (KBC)*, India's version of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, asked her to appear. Mukherjee saw the invitation as a possible lifeline—if she won, it might help fund her treatment.

Last November, millions watched as Mukherjee, wearing dark glasses and a red scarf around her scarred face, discussed her plight. “For years, I have only left the house to go to the hospital. It has been like a jail,” she said. Members of the studio audience were in tears.

Mukherjee went on to answer 10 questions correctly, winning the jackpot of 2.5 million rupees (\$46,000). The audience erupted with joy. Mukherjee says the prize money helped pay for her next round of surgery and restored her will to live. “I know I will never be beautiful again, but now people tell me that my courage and words are beautiful.”

By exposing millions of viewers to her tragedy, Mukherjee also helped highlight the problem of acid attacks. After years of inaction, in February the Indian government approved a law that would imprison acid attackers for 10 years to life. The Supreme Court also directed officials to discuss regulating the sale of acid, and to set up a fund for victims. Mukherjee believes the outpouring of sympathy generated by her appearance helped to spur the legislation. The brave survivor says that when she recovers from her operations, she plans to devote herself to speaking out on behalf of other acid attack victims. “I don't want what was done to me done to any other girls,” she says.