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**Desperate Housewives: Episode 25**

**The characters – Gabrielle Stolis, a regular in Wisteria Lane, and Gandhi himself, mysteriously brought back to life in the 00’s.**

**Gandhi** – Good morning! I believe we are to be neighbours now! My name is Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. But you would probably know me better as just ‘Gandhi’.

**Gabrielle** – I’m sorry, I didn’t realise I was starting. I usually don’t see things like this in the morning! I’m Gabrielle Stolis, I actually don’t remember meeting you before.

**Gandhi** – You haven’t heard of me before? That’s interesting.

**Gabrielle** – Yes...well. How long are you going to stay in Wisteria Lane for?

**Gandhi** – I’m going to start an Ashram here, so I will stay for as long as I’m needed.

**Gabrielle** – Wouldn’t it be better to start your ash-thingy in the house instead of in that hut on the lawn?

**Gandhi** – An Ashram. No, I prefer to live simply and use the earth’s resources sparingly<sup>1</sup>.

**Gabrielle** – Oh. What’s that?

**Gandhi** – An Ashram is a community of people who live together according to a set of common ideals. The ideals of the Ashram I started in India were education, truth – based on non-violence and love, celibacy, non-possession, and the conquering of fear. We tried to use home-made articles, condemned stealing, and avoided alcohol and meat<sup>2</sup>.

**Gabrielle** – Sort of like a hippy commune?

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<sup>1</sup> Weber, Thomas, *Gandhi and Deep Ecology*, accessed online 13/5/05, URL: [<http://www.mkgandhi.org/momgandhi/>].

<sup>2</sup> Initially, Gandhi started up the Kochab Ashram on his return from South Africa in 1915, however he was forced to leave due to an epidemic of disease. The Sabarmati was located close to the Sabarmati River, with rainforest on one side, and a prison on the other.

*The Sabarmati Ashram: A Reflection of Gandhi's Vision*, accessed online 19/5/05, URL: [<http://www.indcast.com/ms/ASHRAM%20HISTORY.htm>].

**Gandhi** – Ah yes, in a way. I remember reading about these community’s that sprung up in the 60’s in America<sup>3</sup>. That was a bit after my time though!!

**Gabrielle** – So you’re Indian? I haven’t been there yet. But I’ve got a really cool Indian sari that I bought a while ago though. But it wasn’t made in India – it was made in China. It was so cheap!

**Gandhi** – China?!

**Gabrielle** – Yes, heaps of our clothing and other stuff is made in China these days<sup>4</sup>. It’s great, because you can get stuff that looks designer, but is heaps cheaper. Not that I have troubles with money or anything<sup>5</sup>... I love shopping. It makes me feel better when I’m down.

**Gandhi** – Yes, I’ve been reading a little about the consumeristic tendencies of this society. It seems to have really taken off after WWII, when TV advertising started to spread ideals of a good life that included lots of things to own<sup>6</sup>. I believe that this consumerism does not help our society to progress<sup>7</sup>.

**Gabrielle** – I don’t understand – doesn’t the fact that we can buy heaps of cool stuff indicate that we’re better off? I thought that poverty was caused because all of those people in third world countries who won’t reduce the number of children they have<sup>8</sup>. Besides, when I shop, it means that I’m supporting all the factory workers in places like Indonesia. Without these factories, these people wouldn’t have a job<sup>9</sup>.

**Gandhi** – It is true that these factories do employ people. However, these factories are visiting violence on the masses that are being exploited by them<sup>10</sup>. They are being paid the tiniest fraction of what the goods eventually sell for. These factories help to institutionalise poverty<sup>11</sup>. In India, I advocated a

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<sup>3</sup> Hippy Communes as such, started during the 60’s in America and spreading to the rest of the world weren’t run in accordance with Gandhi’s principles, however they are an example of people trying out an alternative lifestyle, and living according to values that aren’t accepted in the mainstream.

Accessed online 19/5/05, URL:[<http://www.naturismo.org/adn/ediciones/2005/18e.html>].

<sup>4</sup> Textile and Apparel imports to the US rose from 12 million thousand US dollars in 2003 to 18 million thousand US dollars in 2005.

Accessed online 19/5/05, URL:[<http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/statistics/country/sreport/china.xls>]

Also mentioned on “Made In China”, a documentary produced and directed by Rick Young, shown on the Cutting Edge, SBS, 17/5/05

<sup>5</sup> Gabrielle is in fact lying just a tad about her money problems here. Her husband Carlos is in trouble with the law, their assets are being frozen as the proceeds of ill gotten gains, and she is learning how tough it is to earn a wage, which is having an effect on her ability to shop. The latter has disconcerted her more than Carlos being arrested for fraud.

<sup>6</sup> Gandhi might have found this out while watching the video *Consuming Passions* from the People’s Planet Series, produced by Tele Images International, and distributed by Video Education Australasia.

<sup>7</sup> *Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., G.A. Natesan & Co, Madras, 1933, p.353, accessed online 13/5/05, under heading “The Gospel of Non-Possession, URL:[<http://www.mkgandhi.org/momgandhi/momindex.htm>]

<sup>8</sup> Poverty and population are often linked by people in more affluent countries, however, usually in the wrong way – ie, that population causes poverty. One website advocating this view is [<http://www.overpopulation.org/whyPopMatters.html>], accessed online 29/3/05.

<sup>9</sup> Sweatshops do provide jobs for people – but as the Ethical Matters website says, “Why should there only be two choices?” accessed online 19/5/05, URL:[<http://www.ethicalmatters.co.uk/articles.asp?itemID=270&title=Consumer>]

<sup>10</sup> The two truths that underwrote all of Gandhi’s ideas were Truth, and Non-violence. This non-violence includes the violence perpetrated when people are exploited by other people. More information on this can be found in “Elements in Gandhian Economics” by Diwan, R & Gidwani, S. - *Essays in Gandhian Economics*, Diwan, R & Lutz, M (Eds) Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, 1985, p.56.

<sup>11</sup> Some facts about sweatshops can be found on the ‘Ethical Matters’ website. This includes the facts that in Indonesia, workers were paid so little that they couldn’t afford to live with their children, the CEO of The Gap was paid over seven million dollars in 1999, while workers in China were paid approximately 23c/hr, and that if you were working for Nike in Indonesia, you couldn’t afford to buy a chicken on a days wages, much less cough medicine or jeans. Accessed 19/5/05, URL: [<http://www.ethicalmatters.co.uk/articles.asp?itemID=270&title=Consumer>]

return to a smaller, village based economy, where local people in the villages would be employed to produce India's needs<sup>12</sup>. In a similar way, people here in Wisteria Lane could support a local growers market, to encourage local agricultural production.

**Gabrielle** – (laughing) We're in the middle of a city here, Gandhi. Where are the local growers going to grow their produce?

**Gandhi** – Look at the spacious yards that you all have, growing nothing but grass. I think that if you made a veggie garden that only took up a half of the yard, you would be able to grow a significant amount of food. I plan to grow a veggie garden here, in that corner of the yard (pointing).

**Gabrielle** – But food is so cheap in the supermarkets. And I have much more of a choice than if I were to try to grow my own food. And I can't grow those pasta bake in a packet thingys.

**Gandhi** – Yes. I have looked at the prices in the big stores. These prices are deceptive. They do not reflect the true costs to the local communities that stop growing food for themselves in order to grow cash crops to sell, or the environment which is destroyed to grow these crops<sup>13</sup>. In fact, these sorts of practises are also a big cause of poverty in the world. According to some people I've been talking to in the last few weeks, there is a reduction of living standards in the US because prices are being driven down by big retailers like Wal-Mart, forcing manufacturing companies to move offshore, resulting in a loss of jobs in America<sup>14</sup>.

**Gabrielle** – I think everything will be solved if you go over to Africa or wherever, and teach them about contraception. Why should I be made to feel like it's my fault that there is so much poverty in the world? Like I said, it's because they have so many children that they're poor<sup>15</sup>.

**Gandhi** – Yes, this is a popular misconception about poverty. It is true that poverty has a close relationship with a high population, but poverty is actually a cause of population growth, rather than a result<sup>16</sup>. Poverty has more factors than simple straightforward population growth.

**Gabrielle** – (Stubbornly) But you can't deny that there is a higher birth rate in countries like Africa?

**Gandhi** – Africa isn't actually a country. But you're right; certain countries in the continent Africa have higher birth rates than more affluent countries like Australia or America<sup>17</sup>. However poverty is a factor in this, not the other way around. In a country with no welfare, children are a provision for the

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<sup>12</sup> Narain, Jai, *Economic Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, Sehgal Publishers Service, 1991, p.44

<sup>13</sup> This includes forcing food farming onto subsistence soils, and the detrimental environmental effects of intensive farming. More details can be found on the webpage accessed 24/5/05, URL: [<http://www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/Consumption/Effects.asp>].

<sup>14</sup> Young, Rick, "Made In China" (documentary), Shown on The Cutting Edge, SBS, 17/5/05.

<sup>15</sup> This is an easy, logical conclusion to come to – children cost money, therefore, the more children you have, the more money you have to earn in order to look after them. It is very simplistic, but it works!! In addition, an increased population is seen as a main factor in many environmental problems. A good summary of this view point can be seen on the World Overpopulation Awareness website, accessed 29/3/05, URL: [<http://www.overpopulation.org/whyPopMatters.html>]

<sup>16</sup> For example, the billboard ad seen by Peter Henriot in Zambia and mentioned in his article "The Challenge of Poverty Eradication in Africa and its Relationship to Population and Development: The Zambian case study", Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, accessed online 19/5/05,

URL: [[http://www.jtr.org.zm/publications/population\\_poverty\\_dev.html](http://www.jtr.org.zm/publications/population_poverty_dev.html)]. The ad was for family planning, and suggested that a large family brought on poverty by showing a picture of a happy smiling wealthy family with two children, next to another picture of a large poor family outside their run down house. The caption was "Plan Your Family for a Prosperous Future".

<sup>17</sup> Gandhi would have found this out by reading any book that summarised facts about different countries of the world. For example – *SBS World Guide: The complete fact file on every country*, 10<sup>th</sup> Ed., Hardie Grant Books, Australia, 2002.

future. High rates of illiteracy have been shown to affect the number of children that a woman has, as well as the status that women have in that particular country<sup>18</sup>.

**Gabrielle** – Here, all you’d have to do for more status is to buy some really cute Gucci shoes, and be seen in some of the right places. It’s a pity that we can’t sort of “Queer Eye for a Straight Guy” people over there, to help them increase their status, or something<sup>19</sup>.

**Gandhi** – I too wonder about how we can help improve the lot of our less fortunate brothers. I believe that if every person practised non-possession, and only owned what they needed, this would free us from the clutches of the false spirituality spread by marketers, and help us to achieve *swaraj*<sup>20</sup>.

**Gabrielle** – Whoah. I don’t really understand the ‘s’ word there – what does that mean? I do understand the non-possession bit though, and I disagree!! I need my possessions - they define who I am - right down to that pair of slinky shoes I bought to prove to Carlos that I didn’t need his money<sup>21</sup>.

**Gandhi** – *Swaraj* is an ideal state achieved by an individual, where they are only ruled by themselves<sup>22</sup>.

**Gabrielle** – (in a rare moment of insight) So because I want things, and am after the latest and best, and if possible the most beautiful, I’m not ruled by myself, I’m ruled by the things I want? How does that have an effect on poverty, and population?

**Gandhi** – This is a most insightful question, Gabrielle. From my research, what I understand to be happening is this: the drive to experience satisfaction and identity from owning certain objects has created a huge consumer lifestyle in more affluent countries. The production of these objects is driven by economic factors, and often there is little or no thought into the costs to other people brought about

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<sup>18</sup> The Population Institute has this sort of information in its document summarising the actions recommended by the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994. Eradication of illiteracy and full employment opportunities for women are the first two proposals for reducing population growth, then access to family planning.

Accessed online 23/5/05, URL: [[http://population.newc.com/teampublish/71\\_234\\_4085.cfm](http://population.newc.com/teampublish/71_234_4085.cfm)]

<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, Gabrielle has just managed to really show off her ignorance about the circumstances in which most of the world lives. However, this is a common attitude that is encouraged by advertisers – when you buy stuff, you’re not just buying stuff, you’re buying a lifestyle; you’re buying an attitude. The TV show “Queer Eye for a Straight Guy” involves a team of homosexual men visiting a heterosexual man, and ‘fixing’ his life. Three quarters of the fixing involves redecorating his house/apartment, buying him a new wardrobe, getting him a hair cut, and introducing him to some sort of beauty routine (for want of a better description), and teaching him how to cook something. There is usually gift giving to a significant other included also. In other words, the perception that one can ‘fix’ one’s life, and transcend one’s circumstances through buying things is perpetuated. This is classic consumerism, as explained in the book by Zygmunt Bauman – *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, Open University Press, Buckingham, 1998. For more information on Queer Eye, see [http://www.bravotv.com/Queer\\_Eye\\_for\\_the\\_Straight\\_Guy/](http://www.bravotv.com/Queer_Eye_for_the_Straight_Guy/).

<sup>20</sup> The Gandhian concept of non-possession is described more fully in the essay “Elements in Gandhian Economics” by Diwan, R & Gidwani, S. - *Essays in Gandhian Economics*, Diwan, R & Lutz, M (Eds) Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, 1985, pp.55-59.

<sup>21</sup> These shoes were bought on the credit card of Gabrielle’s lover, at a time when Carlos had frozen all of Gabrielle’s credit cards in order to force her to let him back into the marital bed. Gabrielle was refusing to sleep with him because he had physically forced her to sign a post-nuptial agreement altering their pre-nuptial agreement. Consumerism is not so much the buying of things, but the point of view that we gain fulfillment from what we buy. This can make it difficult to separate needs from wants. This is outlined in the essay titled ‘Consuming Goods and the Good of Consuming’ by Colin Campbell, in *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*, Glickman, L.B., (Ed), Cornell University Press, London, 1999, pp.21-26.

<sup>22</sup> Diwan, R & Gidwani, S., “Elements in Gandhian Economics”, *Essays in Gandhian Economics*, Diwan, R & Lutz, M (Eds) Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, 1985, p.55

by making these products<sup>23</sup>. For example, the sweatshops that we talked about earlier contribute to the poverty of the workers, and they also provide that cheap clothing that everyone wants. I think perhaps, although lots of people are happy to blame the increasing population for environmental problems; this is not the only factor. The west must look to its own consumption habits.

**Gabrielle** – So, one solution would be for consumers to be more careful about what they buy. – like, buying products that are organic so that there aren't as many pesticides being used?

**Gandhi** – This would indeed solve some environmental problems. More than just buying organic products, people need to look at the amount of packaging on a product also. Buying products that last, and not throwing out as much would make a huge difference, as would buying products that are more easily recyclable, reusable or biodegradable.

**Gabrielle** – Yeah, and as a street, Wisteria Lane could share big things like power tools and ladders. That would probably save us money too<sup>24</sup>!

**Gandhi** – You have the right idea, Gabrielle. Living a simpler life, without a lot of luxuries allows us to get closer to achieving rulership of ourselves by no-one but ourselves. This is an ideal state in which to live.

**Gabrielle** – Living simply... hmmm. Maybe we could sell some stuff, and tell people we're living simply!! I think it might be the latest fashion anyway! That would solve everything<sup>25</sup>.

**Gandhi** – But if your hearts not really in it, are you practising truth in your life? I think this is deceptive – to embrace a view for your own benefit, rather than because you really believe in it. This is not how you live by moral law. This does not bring happiness<sup>26</sup>.

**Gabrielle** – So you think that even if corporations appear to be environmentally conscious, it is of no benefit unless they truly believe in it?

**Gandhi** – It is great if corporations are forced to realise that the environment matters to their customers. However, unless they truly believe in reducing their impact on the earth, their efforts will be deceptive and won't fulfil their true potential<sup>27</sup>.

**Gabrielle** – Wow, you don't ask for much, do you!!

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<sup>23</sup> Shah, A., "Effects of Consumerism – A cycle of wastes, disparities and poverty", accessed online 24/5/05, URL: [http://www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/Consumption/Effects.asp].

<sup>24</sup> Gabrielle isn't so much concerned with reducing resource consumption, as saving money, due to her continuing money problems. However, it is a very good suggestion, even if suggested for all the wrong reasons.

<sup>25</sup> Gabrielle is again referring to is her continuing money problems, and the need to keep up appearances in Wisteria Lane while not having enough money to fix the plumbing. Selling some of her many beautiful things would provide some quick cash. Because consumerism advocates a linking of identity and lifestyle to consumer goods (and this changes fast), Gabrielle thinks that by taking on a certain identity, which happens to involve owning less stuff, her reputation will not be tarnished by poverty, and she will still be able to hold her head up in Wisteria Lane. An explanation of this facet of consumerism can be read in *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, by Zygmunt Bauman, Open University Press, Buckingham, 1998, pp.28-29.

<sup>26</sup> Gandhi believed that true happiness for man came when he was following moral law, not necessarily the law of the land. This could be likened to the difference between obeying the letter of the law, as opposed to the spirit of the law – but on a much larger scale. Truth was one of the foundations of this moral law.

Narain, Jai, *Economic Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, Seghal Publishers Inc, 1991, p.23.

<sup>27</sup> Gandhi's research has uncovered the new practise of 'green-washing' by companies – defined on Source Watch as a PR exercise aimed at creating the (false) impression that they are concerned about the environment. Accessed online 27/5/05, URL: [http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Greenwashing].

**Gandhi** – The world has a huge problem approaching, because poorer countries like China are looking to achieve the same lifestyles as more affluent countries<sup>28</sup>. Action needs to be taken now. I always believe in living out my theories<sup>29</sup>. That is what I hope to achieve by starting an Ashram here.

**Gabrielle** – I think I live out my theories too. I think I won't be happy unless I buy that dress, or bag, or hat, or car or whatever, so I buy it<sup>30</sup>.

**Gandhi** – And does it make you happy?

**Gabrielle** – (thoughtfully) No... actually. There is always something else that I have to buy. Maybe that's why my wardrobe is so large.

**Gandhi** – There is a lot of waste in affluent countries because of this pursuit after happiness<sup>31</sup>. I saw your garbage dump yesterday, and there were things thrown out that weren't even broken – just not wanted anymore. Reducing consumption will reduce the amount of waste that is being thrown out. You mentioned sharing big things like power tools and ladders earlier, sharing magazines and catalogues will also help the environment.

**Gabrielle** – You know, I've never thought twice about my lifestyle, and how it is affecting the environment. There seems to be heaps of small things we can do to improve the environment. I always thought it was out of my hands, because I can't control the population in poor countries – although I was trying to do my bit until Carlos switched my contraception pills with fakes<sup>32</sup>. Dirty rotten scoundrel...

**Gandhi** – It seems that you are in need of some truth in your relationships, as well as your spending habits<sup>33</sup>... You have a great opportunity to bring up your child as a responsible citizen, who will not perpetrate the mistakes that are being made now. This is also a solution to environmental problems. We need to change, but we also need to teach our children a new way of living. To tell the truth, I am disappointed by how little the world appears to have progressed since 1948<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> In China, the increase in the use of cars is increasing pollution. "As Consumerism Spreads, Earth Suffers, Study Says", *National Geographic News*, accessed online 16/5/05, URL:[[http://www.news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/01/0111\\_040112\\_consumerism/](http://www.news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/01/0111_040112_consumerism/)].

<sup>29</sup> Gandhi was quoted saying "I am indeed a practical dreamer. My dreams are not airy nothings. I wasn't to convert my dreams into realities as far as possible" in the *Harijan* (1933:1956), accessed online 13/5/05, URL: [<http://www.mkgandhi.org/momgandhi/>].

<sup>30</sup> Apart from trying to sound like she has an intellectual life to impress Gandhi, Gabrielle is pointing out a key aspect of consumerism – that of the pursuit of happiness. Advertising makes people believe that they can achieve happiness, good relationships, beauty, etc through buying a certain product, so they buy it. But there is always something new, something better, more fashionable out there to buy. Happiness seems to be just around the corner, but then it disappears. This is explained very well on the video by Jhally, Sut (producer and editor), *Advertising and the End of the World* [video recording], Media Education Foundation, Great Britain, c1998.

<sup>31</sup> If more than Gandhi's opinion is needed to confirm this, see "Effects of Consumerism" accessed online 24/5/05, URL: [<http://www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/Consumption/Effects.asp>]. Alternatively, walk down a street in Wollongong when it is council cleanup time.

<sup>32</sup> Yes, this one is true. Gabrielle is pregnant because Carlos replaced her contraception tablets with sugar pills. However, what Carlos doesn't know yet is that it's John's (Gabrielle's lover) child... Sharon Beder mentions that people in more affluent countries tend to blame population for environmental degradation, which neatly takes the onus for action away from themselves in her book *The Nature of Sustainable Development*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed, Scribe Publications, Australia, 1996, p.170.

<sup>33</sup> Gandhi is choosing politely not to ask what contraception pills are, as it seems to be a sensitive topic for Gabrielle.

<sup>34</sup> Gandhi was assassinated in 1948 on his way to a prayer meeting. Through the wonders of modern TV, he is back to inspire Gabrielle, and transform Wisteria Lane. "Mahatma Gandhi", accessed online 13/5/05, URL: [<http://www.ssscnet.ucl.ac.uk/southasia/History/Gandhi/gandhi5.html>].

**Gabrielle** – You can only do so much Gandhi. I think starting an ahsring thingy in Wisteria Lane might be a good idea – to encourage us all to care for the environment in our backyards, and make little changes in our own lifestyle that will help.

**Gandhi** – An Ashram. Yes, I hope that I am able to help guide you all to true happiness.

**Gabrielle** – Oh, I reckon true happiness for me is owning that great new lipstick that has just been released!! I can't wait. I'd better go and buy it now, on my credit card. Bye!

**Gandhi** – (Watches her leave, shaking his head in sadness.)

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