

# Vignettes



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St. Mary's School OGA Newsletter - January 2009

*Those were the days... days...*



*Photographs courtesy Vanessa Greveson*



## *From the President's Desk*



Wish you all a Bright and Prosperous New Year. 2007 has flown by and it is time for our annual alumni meet.

Our website ([www.stmaryspune-oga.com](http://www.stmaryspune-oga.com)) has been launched and will help keep alumni updated about the yearly meetings and other events and find old classmates and friends.

I would like to encourage some of the younger "old girls" to participate in the reunions and serve on the committee and bring new ideas to the reunions for all of us to share. Now, that we have an organisation launched, please support it and make it a success by attending the meets, and sending news of yourself and friends.

We will miss those of you who cannot make it to the reunion this year, especially Mrs. Matthew who is not well enough to attend.

Best Wishes  
**Veena Vora**

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## *Keeping in Touch*

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*Are you looking for old friends? Want to reconnect with long lost classmates? Use this space to put the word out!  
Write to us at : [sms.oga@gmail.com](mailto:sms.oga@gmail.com)*

I'm in the US now, and would very much like to hear from any friends and students and teachers I knew when I was at SMS from 1949 to 1960. I was Zareen Karani then, and I look forward to hearing from long lost classmates.

**Dr. Zareen (Karani) Araoz**  
[zareen@managingcultures.com](mailto:zareen@managingcultures.com)

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Would there be anyone out there who knows me and be willing to make contact or know of the whereabouts of younger girls called Lesley Weir or Wendy Fernandez who were in St Lucy's at the same time? I live in Australia and I was in SMS from 1951 to 1953.

**Adele (Roberts) Arnold**  
[arnold44@bigpond.net.au](mailto:arnold44@bigpond.net.au)

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I have been in touch with a number of SMS girls but have lost touch with all the teachers. There are so many teachers that I remember: Miss Coshan, late Miss Irani (I was sad to hear about her passing), Mrs Ganguli (the best Geography teacher that there was), Dear Miss Thorat, our Marathi teacher who tried so hard to teach me the language, Miss Sonavane, our Hindi teacher, and all the nuns - Sister Stella Francis, Sister Cora and others - all were excellent teachers.

I am in Canada - moved from Toronto after 30 years to Kelowna to retire but that never happened. I am presently an auxiliary with the University of British Columbia Okanagan.

**Harriette Ghosh**  
[harriette@telus.net](mailto:harriette@telus.net)

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Hello! Is there anybody out there who remembers me and the happy-go-lucky days of eternal sunshine and joy? I was in SMS from 1951 to 1962 and am now in Germany.

**Margaret Stiffle**  
[maggie.joyce@web.de](mailto:maggie.joyce@web.de)

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I'm from the class of 1981 and would like to thank all of those involved in launching the OGA. I live in USA and my trips to India have been few and far between but I did manage to meet Mrs. Matthew and see the swanking new pool in 1998. I myself have moved from Cincinnati (1986), New Orleans to our final destination of Chicago in 1995. I met my husband Raja at the University of Cincinnati. He was doing his medical degree and I was finishing up a PhD in Economics.

**Pooja (Opal) Chatterji**  
[pchatt@comcast.net](mailto:pchatt@comcast.net)

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Any old friends who remember me? I was in SMS from 1975 to 1979. I remember Sister Christine Yashoda was in charge and then Mrs. Matthew took over. Actually her daughter Nalini was a batch mate! I now live in USA.

**Kanchana (Kurane) Pavgi**  
[kanchanapavgi@hotmail.com](mailto:kanchanapavgi@hotmail.com)

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I am from the class of 1988 and am trying to locate Mrs. Kumar. She used to teach us English in the 5th standard. Her daughter Radhika Kumar used to study in our school for a few years. Gauri Bhagat, the topper of her batch, was Radhika's friend.

**Pallavi Chhabra**



## UK Film Award for Smita Bhide



**Smita Bhide**

Smita Bhide's film 'The Blue Tower' has been named Best UK Feature at the 16th Raindance Film Festival held last year. Smita wrote and directed the film, set in Southall, West London's colourful and bustling Indian community. Featuring a cast of Asian actors, 'The Blue Tower' is "a full-blooded story of illicit passion and desperate hope which presents a unique and cinematic portrait of multi cultural Britain".

Smita passed out of SMS in 1977. She studied English Literature at Oxford

University, followed by screen writing at the NFTS in 1992. She worked for three years as an advice worker for the women's campaigning group 'Southall Black Sisters', and worked at C4 and Carlton (1989-92) as a researcher and production assistant on the documentaries: Banding File, On The Other Hand, The Provoked Wife, and Dilly Down Town. She has also worked as a refuge worker at the West London Women's Aid. In 1994, she founded Monkey In Heaven Films with Jamie Nuttgens.

## French Honour for Anuradha Wagle

In December 2008, Anuradha (Purandare) Wagle received the honour of being appointed 'Chevalière de l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques' (Knight of the order of the Academic Palms) by the Prime Minister of France for her outstanding contribution to the intellectual and cultural influence of France in the world.

Anuradha passed out of our school in 1981. She started learning French in the ninth standard with Miss Irani and later went on to continue her studies in French. With a BA in French from Fergusson College, she went on to specialise in Translation from the Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi from where she obtained her MA, M.Phil, and PhD degrees. She did a one-year Teachers' training programme in the University of Grenoble in France in 1989 and later

trained in the Advanced Institute for Translators and Interpreters in Paris in 1993. She has also been on fellowships to Universities in Switzerland and Quebec.

Before joining the Goa University, where she is presently Head of the Department of French and Francophone studies, Anuradha taught French at the Master's level at the University of Pune for six years. Associated with the Indian Association of Teachers of French for over 15 years, she is currently its President and has recently also been elected President of the Asia Pacific Commission of the International Federation of Teachers of French headquartered in Paris. She represents 21 countries of the Asia Pacific region in the Executive Council of this organisation there.



**Anuradha Wagle**



# Those were the days...

When I think back about my days at St. Mary's School, the one event that brings back the most nostalgia would be when I walked into the auditorium carrying the St Peter's House flag while the choir sang the School song during the 100-year celebration event in the main auditorium. I was Sub-Prefect of the house and it was the house prefects that were to carry the flags, and did so during the first few rehearsals, while I sang in the choir. But there was something inside me that made me feel that I should have been the one carrying my house flag. And then, the day before the actual event, Mrs. Matthew, while presiding over the rehearsal, decided that the St Peter's house Prefect who was part of a dance performance later in the event didn't need to carry the flag and that I should. Now, this decision could have been a purely logistical one, but I like to believe that on some level Mrs. Matthew saw the longing inside me and did it because she too realised that I needed to carry that flag!

Unfortunately, I do also have some not-so pleasant memories

Girls, it's like a time warp. My mind and soul is still back in School.....especially the boarding school. What can I say - there is so much to remember and smile about. So much to laugh about! I miss the old SMS, the trees, the old shacks we had for junior classes, the small assembly hall, the walk through from junior to senior school. The cafeteria....the old 'bogs', the very English dormitories, now completely destroyed.

I miss my friends Wendy, Rita Ponniah, Bani Bhalla, Kishori, Shubhada Honawar, Shakti Panjiar, Meena Wadhwa. I miss our reading room sessions, and my Hindi movie story telling sagas! I miss the old gramophone the English nuns allowed us boarders to take out on some Saturdays and play old Hindi movie records on, and dance to. I remember Sanober playing the piano exquisitely for us and singing like a dream. I remember Yessonda Fonseca - who also sang like a nightingale! Where are all you people today??

I miss our Dramatics and our Eisteddfods, now just a memory in the new SMS. I remember 'Sunday costs 5 pesos' and me winning the Best Actress Award! I remember how I sang 'We thank thee' with the worst sore throat in 1973 and won the best singer award that year! I remember fondly Drama and French teacher Ms. Irani clapping and cheering me on, and all my friends like Shakti and Sanober helping me get rid of the sore throat that year.

I remember Ms. Sonavane, our Hindi teacher who actually loved me to death but made a show of wagging her finger at me! She never could say Ethel - but called out to me as EEETHAYEL.....! I remember Ms. Warren who taught us English and the tragedy she faced when her son died. I

from my 12 years there, but I'd like to clarify that if I could go back in time and decide which school I'd get to go to, it would still be St Mary's. I don't believe any other school in Pune at the time could have given me the educational and personal grounding that I got there. I didn't enjoy having to hold my breath every time I walked into the toilets. Nor did I appreciate being reprimanded by our PT teacher with a "Don't make excuses you lazy girl, there are no muscles in that area!" when I told him I'd pulled a muscle around my rib cage area while playing tennis over the weekend, and wanted to sit out the PT lesson that afternoon.

In conclusion, I have to admit that the 'SMS snob' label is well validated by the way St Mary's students behave and consider themselves superior to most others. However in our defence, that attitude is just a reflection of the self-confidence and superior level of education we received there!

**Urvashi Desai**

remember Sister Valeria - what a beauty! How can anyone ever forget Sister Mary Anselm and her cat Purush? How can I ever forget how terrified we all were of her uncontrollable anger and how she used to pinch us! I have been bruised by her on numerous occasions but at the end she did have a heart of gold. She loved her cat so much - it was touching.

How can I complete this piece without mentioning Sister Barbara Noreen? Rita Ponniah wrote poems on her! She provided us with unlimited entertainment - with her fetish for food and how she came into our cookery classes and filled her pockets with cookies. She was truly special!

Mrs. Matthew taught us world history and I have such vivid memories of her ending each sentence with a nod and the word 'say'. I even miss the food we used to get in the cafeteria, and I remember Mrs. Salve, the large framed beauty who was in charge of our kitchen. I can never forget how all of us boarders, about 12 of us, got together and shelled prawns in the kitchen for a feast. And oh those lovely candlelight X'mas dinners just before school closed for the winter holidays! Sitting out there on the porch at the beautifully decorated table and sharing the huge spread with the nuns and teachers.....oh I could go on and on but I think I will do it another time!

**Ethel Nalini Rathnam (1974)**





**H**ow can I describe St Mary's! My years at St Mary's were probably the foundations of the person I was to become. The ethos of that School in small time India instilled in me the feelings of loyalty, pride of association and confidence that has enabled me to cope with the diversity of life's lessons that I have encountered.

The school was run by probably the most cheerful coterie of nuns and an army of 'lay' staff. I don't believe for a moment that the nuns (irreverently referred to as 'the penguins') inspired any fervour of Christian rehabilitation in the students, for being Anglicans, they brought the option of 'divinity' classes to us, the prayers and hymn singing at assembly being the only recognition of God, with the availability of the chapel should any pupil wish to use it. I believe it was only used by the boarders to leave inviting messages to the boys of Bishop's School on Sundays!

Sport was very much of school life, and here again the uniform was worn with pride! Netball was the major inter-school competition, and one attended, whatever the weather, to cheer hoarsely, our school to victory. Many a time I returned home having been soaked to the skin while cheering the school team on! I remember one gruelling match in standards 10/11, when we walked down Main Street en masse, in dripping blues, just to let the town know that SMS had won yet again!

The girls of St Mary's High School were allocated to three 'houses': St Patrick's, St Michael's and St Francis'. Each House had its commemorative day, and anthem or song and an annual 'house day' picnic! On each commemorative day, the House members were given precedence of entry to the morning assembly, and the other Houses had to stand in respectful silence while they sang their anthem. The only time this precedent was broken was the first year of St Peter's. I forget which year it was when a Sister Judith-Anne joined us. She was a daughter of Australia, and as the houses by then had become quite unwieldy, the executive decided to form a fourth House and so St Peter's with its colour red was born. Unfortunately, the libretto for the new house anthem was written by Sister Judith-Anne and sung to the tune of 'Waltzing Matilda' - well we couldn't let that go by without derisive reaction! I remember that entire day the school resounded to 'What shall we do to a sister said Superior, throw her in the billabong, the billabong said we!!'

Discipline was very strict in SMS. We had to stand up every time a teacher or an invited guest came into the classroom, hands were raised before we could speak. We were marked on our general decorum and behaviour in what became known as 'Department' marks that were posted every fortnight. At the end of the year if you had all straight 'A's, you received a 'Department' badge, which changed colour with every successive year, so that by standard eleven, it was a matter of pride that you wore a 'red' badge, for it meant you had achieved four years of department 'A's. Vocabulary was strictly monitored, and you received a discredit mark if heard using the word 'gosh!' A register was maintained on behaviour and performance, and three discredit marks a week

was rewarded by a punishment assignment!

In hind sight I do believe that St Mary's was the epitome of a traditional English establishment school! The years from 1947 to 1957 were probably the most carefree of my life. St Mary's occupied most of the living hours for me, as I became involved in debates, dramatics, music and Gymnastics. At school too, I managed to win a prize for the theory of music in 1952, a book 'Anne of Green Gables' which I still have, and in 1956 the school gym colours, my only real achievements of note!

These are my dearest and fondest memories of a wonderful time in my life.

**Jessie (Dugal) Mehta 1957**



**A**mong the many memories of my 12 years at St. Mary's are fond recollections of walking...

- ◆ Back from school with Aiman (Khumree). I would take the long way home by way of Napier Road where Aiman lived
- ◆ With Nalini (Sangtani) from the tuck shop and having a kite swoop down to snatch the batata wada leaving me with a nasty scratch on the cheek
- ◆ Down Main Street with my aunt Mithu (Advani) and Sister Cora greeting us by name (I was in third grade)
- ◆ In the evening with Ferzin (Bharucha)
- ◆ Past the race course to Shanti's (Joseph) home where her mother made us the most delicious dosas

Now when I visit Pune and experience the heavy traffic on Solapur Road I yearn for the slow life when there were more tongas than trucks on that road!

**Malti (Manuskhani) Desai 1961**

**M**usic is an important part of my life and has been for years. Singing was a favourite activity. We were able to sing together in large choirs of 4 and 8 part harmony, without sheet music. There are memories of winning every inter-school choir competition. Years later, a similar feeling of joyful satisfaction prompted me to leave my job to attend college for the second time, with kids almost half my age. I loved every moment. Today one of many things I look forward to is preparing weekly or for a Sunday church solo.

Academics at SMS have always been of a high standard, thanks to our committed teachers. Mrs. Matthew, I remember, brought Julius Caesar to life. It was fun to relive the script and its familiar characters during Opera Workshop in New York.

One word comes to mind gratitude. Gratitude for a well rounded foundation, for faculty that nurtured and cared, for the motivation that comes from team sports and the bonding that follows, and for special friendships that continue to make me smile!

**Dilshad (Khambatta) Eames 1981**





## Retracing a Mother's Journey

*Last year we received an email enquiry from the UK from Vanessa Greveson, whose mother Mary Taplin was a student of SMS between 1935 and 1943 as a boarder. Vanessa and her siblings were planning a trip to India and wanted to get in touch with their mother's classmate Katy (Sukhia) Dastur, and others who might remember her. The OGA was able to help them connect with Homai Pudumjee, who hosted a lunch for 'Mary's children' when they were in Pune. Here is Vanessa's account of their trip...*

What an amazing trip we've all had! I can't thank you all enough for your help in making our trip so very memorable. If I think back to the first tentative enquiry to the Old Girls Association and to Sister Valeria in Wantage there has always been someone who has gone out of their way to help us put the jigsaw of our mother's childhood together. My sisters Sue and Lyn, my niece Hannah Mary, my brother David, his fiancée Sheila and myself have been overwhelmed by everyone's gracious hospitality and enthusiasm for our trip in memory of our mother, Mary Taplin. She was at SMS between 1935 and 1943 as a boarder and was in the same class as Katy (Sukhia) Dastur.

We flew into Pune on Sunday evening and so Monday was our very first day in India. Homai and her husband Nusly had organised a wonderful lunch party where we met our first Old Girls! It was quite amazing to meet people who were our mother's contemporaries. It was particularly poignant as Mary had sadly died when she was only 49 (32 years ago). We all poured over the old photographs and names were put to faces and places for us. As soon as girls recognised themselves or an old friend there were shouts of glee and many anecdotes of school life were retold. It really did bring Mary's school days alive for us. We left with a feeling of warmth and happiness and are so grateful to Homai for all the hard work she must have put into that day on our behalf.

We also truly appreciated Phyllis and Eustace's spontaneous kindness in offering to meet us later in the day to show us where the cemetery holding our

grandfather's grave might be. I was very touched when they then became part of the search party to find the grave. It seemed a little like divine providence when it was them and my sister Lyn who actually discovered the gravestone. (Lyn had done so much research before our trip to find out which cemetery we should go to but had been very concerned that we might not be able to gain access to it.)

Straight after lunch we visited St Marys itself and were again overwhelmed by the time so freely given to us by Mrs David and her colleagues. We took photo after photo of the old parts of the School and were taken around the whole campus by Mrs David. For us it was an enchanting experience, walking through the gates and round the grounds thinking of Mary doing exactly the same so many years earlier. An emotional time for us!

Katy Dastur had not been able to come to Pune so we met at the Royal Bombay Yacht Club and again poured over old photographs. What an incredible memory Katy has! It really felt to us as if Katy and Mary had been together just a few days ago.

It is difficult to find the right words to explain how important this visit was to us. I know that Monday and our later lunch with Katy will always be very special to us because of the kindness and warmth of the people we met who brought Mary back to us as a schoolgirl in India.

We send a very big and heartfelt thank you from us all!

**Vanessa Greveson**

